Leading historians explore Nelson's greatest victory

THE TRAFALGAR COMPANION

EDITOR
ALEXANDER STILWELL

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Front cover image: Detail from *The Panorama of the Battle of Trafalgar* by W. L. Wyllie RA (1851–1931), showing HMS *Victory* and HMS *Téméraire* engaging the *Redoutable*. (The Royal Naval Museum)

Title page image: The *Santísima Trinidad*. (The Albert and Roland Umhey Collection)

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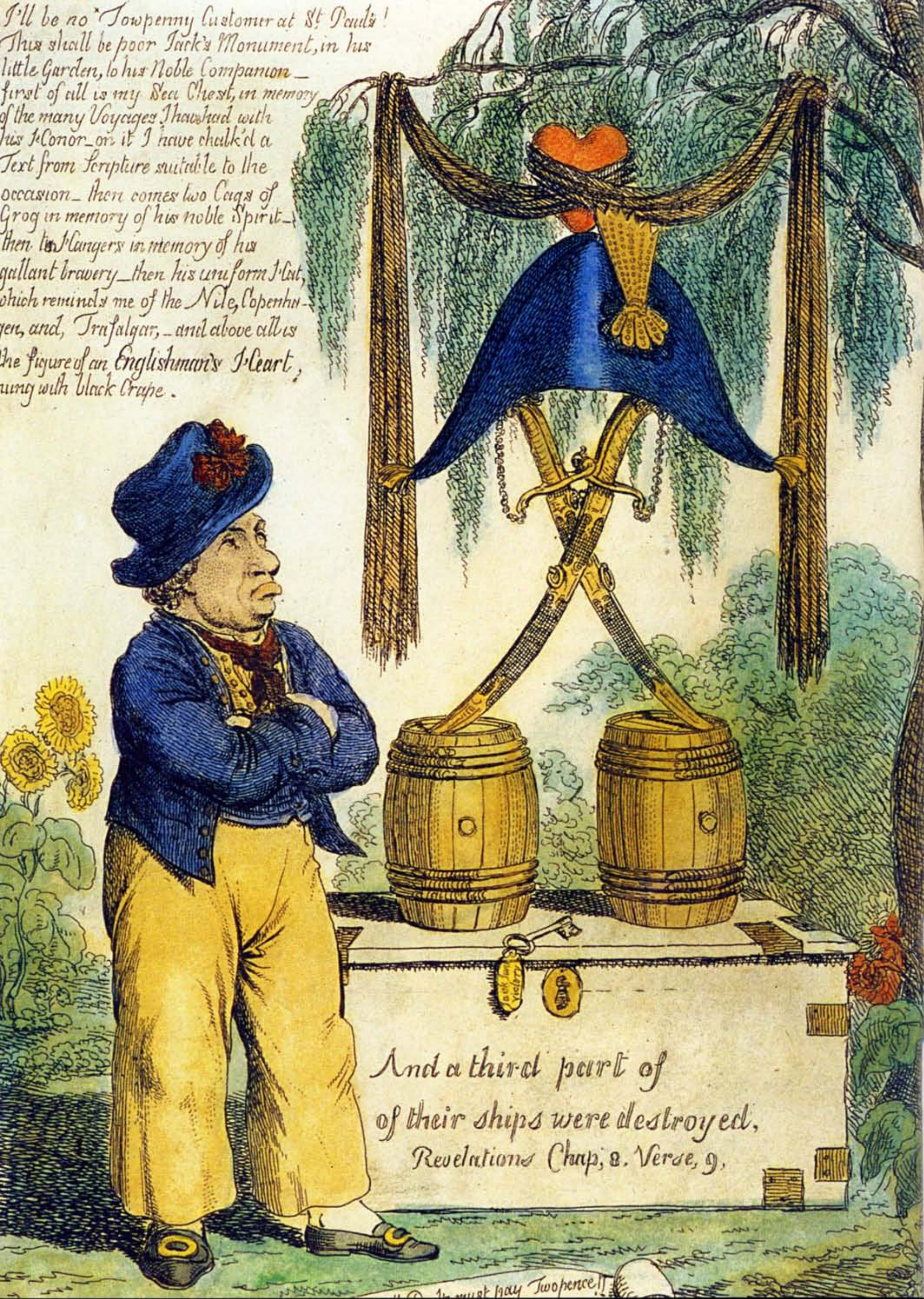

I'll be no *Towpenny Customer at St Paul's! This shall be poor Jack's Monument, in his little Garden, to his Noble Companion _ first of all is my Sea Chest, in memory of the many Voyages I have had with his Honor _ on it I have chalk'd a Text from Scripture suitable to the occasion _ then comes two Cags of Grog in memory of his noble Spirit _ then two Hangers in memory of his gallant bravery _ then his uniform Hat, which reminds me of the Nile, Copenhagen, and, Trafalgar, _ and above all is the figure of an Englishman's Heart, hung with black Crape.
Jack Jun Victory
And a third part of
of their ships were destroyed.
Revelations Chap, 8. Verse, 9.
must pay Twopence!!

INTRODUCTION

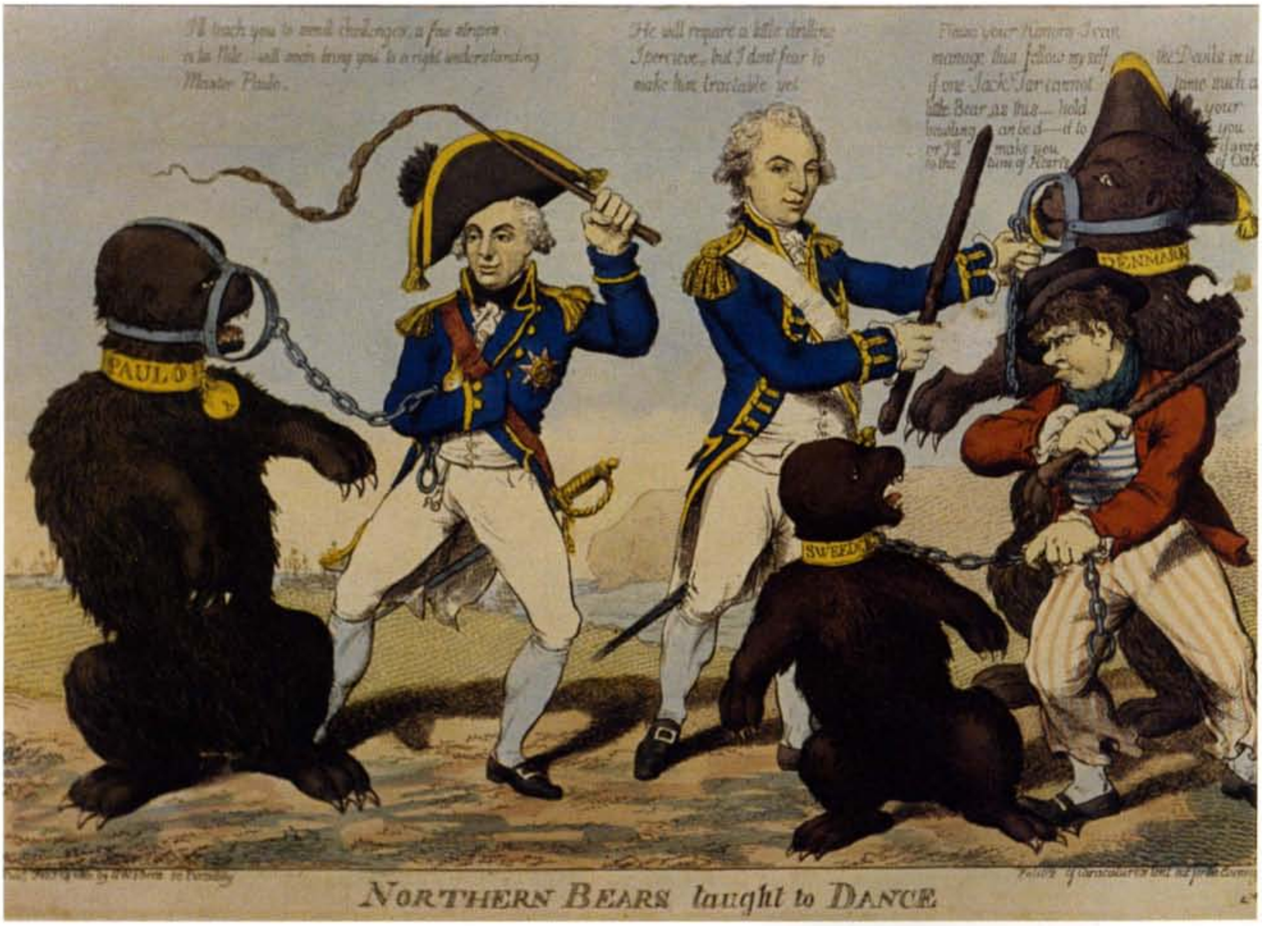
PROFESSOR JOHN B. HATTENDORF

Throughout the period from the mid-seventeenth century to 1815, France was the most powerful single state in Europe. England came into fundamental opposition to France in 1689, through the change of foreign policy that was associated with the accession of William III and Mary II to the English throne. Following that event, England (from 1707 Great Britain; and from 1801 the United Kingdom) fought a series of seven different major wars against France, during which she usually aligned herself with a coalition of other European powers designed to balance France's superior forces. The last two of these wars merged together, but are usually separately named: the War of the French Revolution from 1792 to 1799 and the Napoleonic Wars from 1799 to 1815.[1]

A series of wars, beginning with the Russo-Turkish War in 1787 and followed by the War of the French Revolution and the first phases of the Napoleonic Wars up to 1812, marked the gradual collapse in the structure of international politics that had characterized European relations for a century and more. The phases of warfare which immediately followed, between 1812 and 1815, were clearly a continuation of those wars, but their effects were directed toward the construction of a new replacement structure for European affairs. In this broad and difficult process, the earlier system of balance-of-power politics among the major states, focused around their own separate interests, was eventually succeeded by a new system, based on a European-wide consensus that preserved the existence and independence of all the actors, including those that had been previously threatened by the earlier process. This new approach involved a shift in European mentality and outlook, whose origins preceded the wars and whose results went far beyond them, to create an alternative to warfare through the new international system that was created.[2]

The collapse of the international system between 1793 and 1812 during this series of wars was paralleled and eventually intertwined with the initial failure of some of the patriotic reform movements that were trying to improve the

OPPOSITE
The Sailor's Monument to the memory of Lord Nelson (London: Etching published by William Holland, December 1805). This caricature criticized the policy of charging two pence for the public to pay their respects to Nelson.
(Royal Naval Museum)


I'll teach you to send challenges, a few stripes ... will soon bring you to a right understanding Master Paulo.
He will require a little drilling I perceive, but I dont fear to make him tractable yet
Please your Honors I can manage this fellow my self if one Jack Tar cannot ... such a little Bear as this ... hold bowling ... or I'll make you ... to the tune of Hearts of Oak
PAUL I
SWEDE
DENMARK
NORTHERN BEARS taught to DANCE

Northern Bears Brought to Dance (London, Etching published by S.W. Fores, 14 February 1801). This political cartoon followed the announcement that the fleet under Admiral Sir Hyde Parker and Vice-Admiral Lord Nelson would be ordered to the Baltic and that a state of war existed with The League of Armed Neutrality, involving Britain's embargo against Danish, Swedish and Russian shipping. This caricature anticipated the Royal Navy's victory at Copenhagen, 2 April 1801. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)

functioning of the Old Regime monarchical system, and with the subsequent failure to replace it with democratic and republic forms of government. These efforts to instill democratic forms of government in Europe resulted in civil war and widespread chaos that turned quickly to rule by despotic force. The collapse in the international system brought with it a change in the character of warfare, as leaders sought to use battle as a decisive political force, involving extremes in violence and destruction that went far beyond what had been experienced previously.

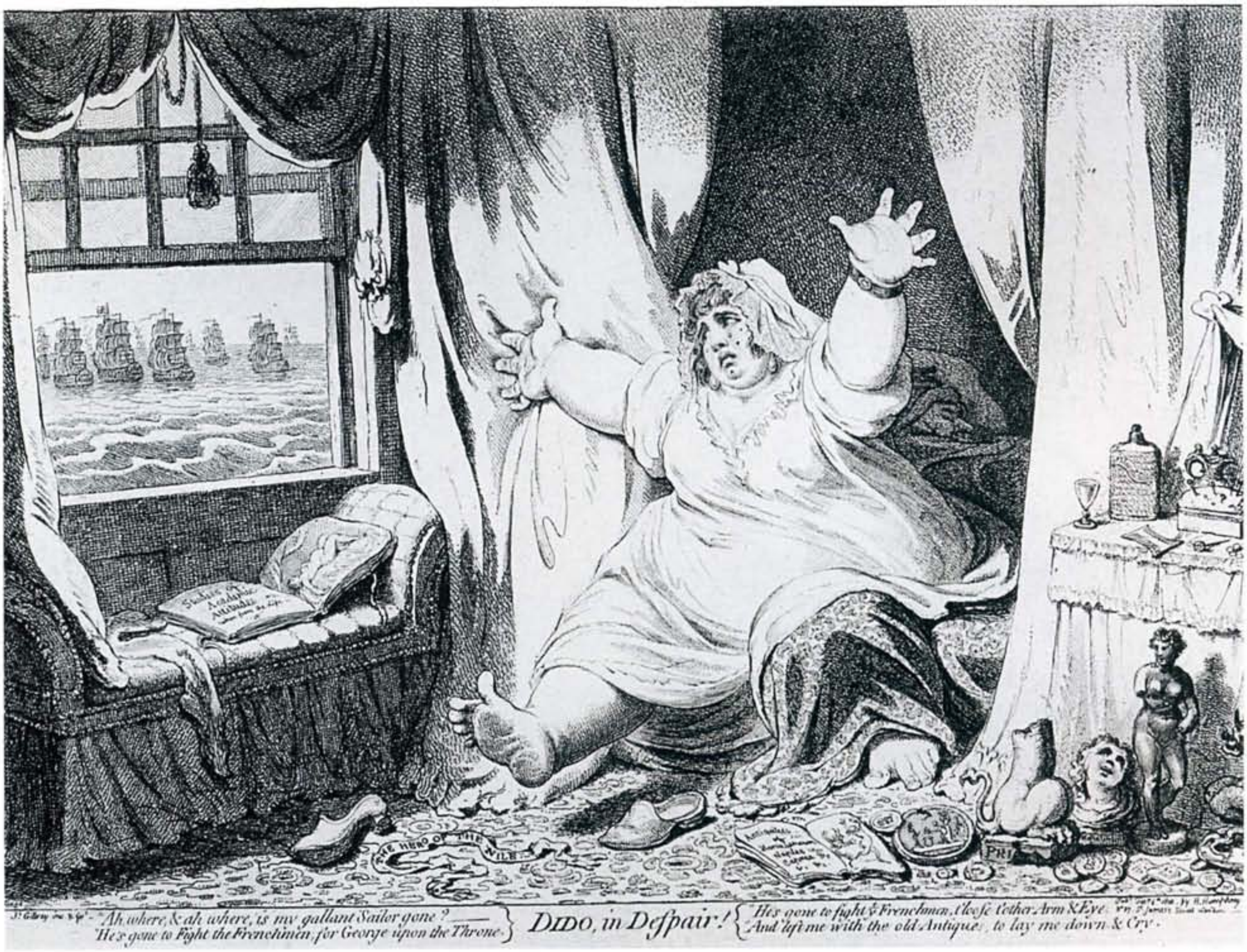
The Wars of the French Revolution had begun only in April 1792, as a response to the slowly deteriorating international situation surrounding and resulting from the developing internal revolution in France that had begun in 1789. At first, Britain stood aside and declined to join the First Coalition that was forming to fight France from 1792 onwards. Within the context of a variety of crosscurrents in domestic and international politics that either encouraged war or argued against it, Britain eventually entered the war against France in February 1793. In this, the critical factor was the French invasion of the Austrian Netherlands and the associated threat to the Dutch Republic that led to the break-up of Anglo-French diplomatic relations.[3] Historically, the presence of an enemy in the Low Countries has repeatedly been a matter of the greatest strategic concern for Britain as the most effective staging point for an invasion. It had been the critical issue at the time of the Armada, and William III's successful landing had been launched from there, a century later, in 1688. It was an issue in the world wars of the twentieth century as it was in the time of the French Revolution and Napoleon.[4]

Following Britain's entry into the war against France in 1793, the next 22 years saw a series of interrelated, successive, or overlapping phases of warfare that alternated with brief periods of peace, to which historians have given varying names and coalition numbers. The following provides a list, among several alternatives available, for the purposes of general orientation:

1792–1797: First Coalition, ending with the Treaty of Campo Formio.
1797–1801: Quasi-War between France and the United States, ending in the Convention of Mortefontaine.
1798–1802: Second Coalition, ending with the Peace of Amiens.
1805: Third Coalition, ending with the Treaty of Pressburg.
1806–1807: Fourth Coalition, ending with the Treaty of Tilsit.
1808–1814: The Peninsular War in Spain and Portugal.
1809: Fifth Coalition, ending in the Treaty of Schönbrunn.
1812–1815: The Anglo-American War of 1812, ending with the Peace of Ghent.
1812–1814: Sixth Coalition, ending in Napoleon's abdication and exile to Elba, Treaty of Fontainebleau, and the Congress of Vienna.
1815: Seventh Coalition: The One Hundred Days, ending in the battle of Waterloo and Napoleon's exile to St Helena.

THE FRAGILE PEACE, 1801–03

The battle of Trafalgar was an event that occurred in the context of the events involved in the breakdown of the Peace of Amiens, which had ended the War of the Second Coalition in March 1802, and the formation and conduct of the War of the Third Coalition between 1803 and 1805. The Peace of Amiens was a compromise peace and the result of the momentary general exhaustion of both France and Britain. In the face of the dissolution of the Second Coalition and strong public demands at home for peace with a worsening economic situation, British Prime Minister Henry Addington and his Cabinet colleagues, who had come to power following William Pitt's resignation in February 1801 over the Catholic relief issue, felt that they could live with the agreement and with France. This view, however, was based on the assumption that the French Revolution was over and the government in Paris would remain stable and resist the temptation for further expansion, either in Europe or overseas. Even if the war were to be resumed, the Peace had the clear advantage of providing a respite to both sides to recover their finances and regroup their resources and plans. The Peace was certainly advantageous for Bonaparte, who immediately used the opportunity to


THE HERO OF THE NILE
PRI
"Ah, where, & ah where, is my gallant Sailor gone? —
He's gone to Fight the Frenchmen, for George upon the Throne.
Dido, in Deſpair!
He's gone to fight ye Frenchmen, t'loose t'other Arm & Eye.
And left me with the old Antique, to lay me down & Cry.

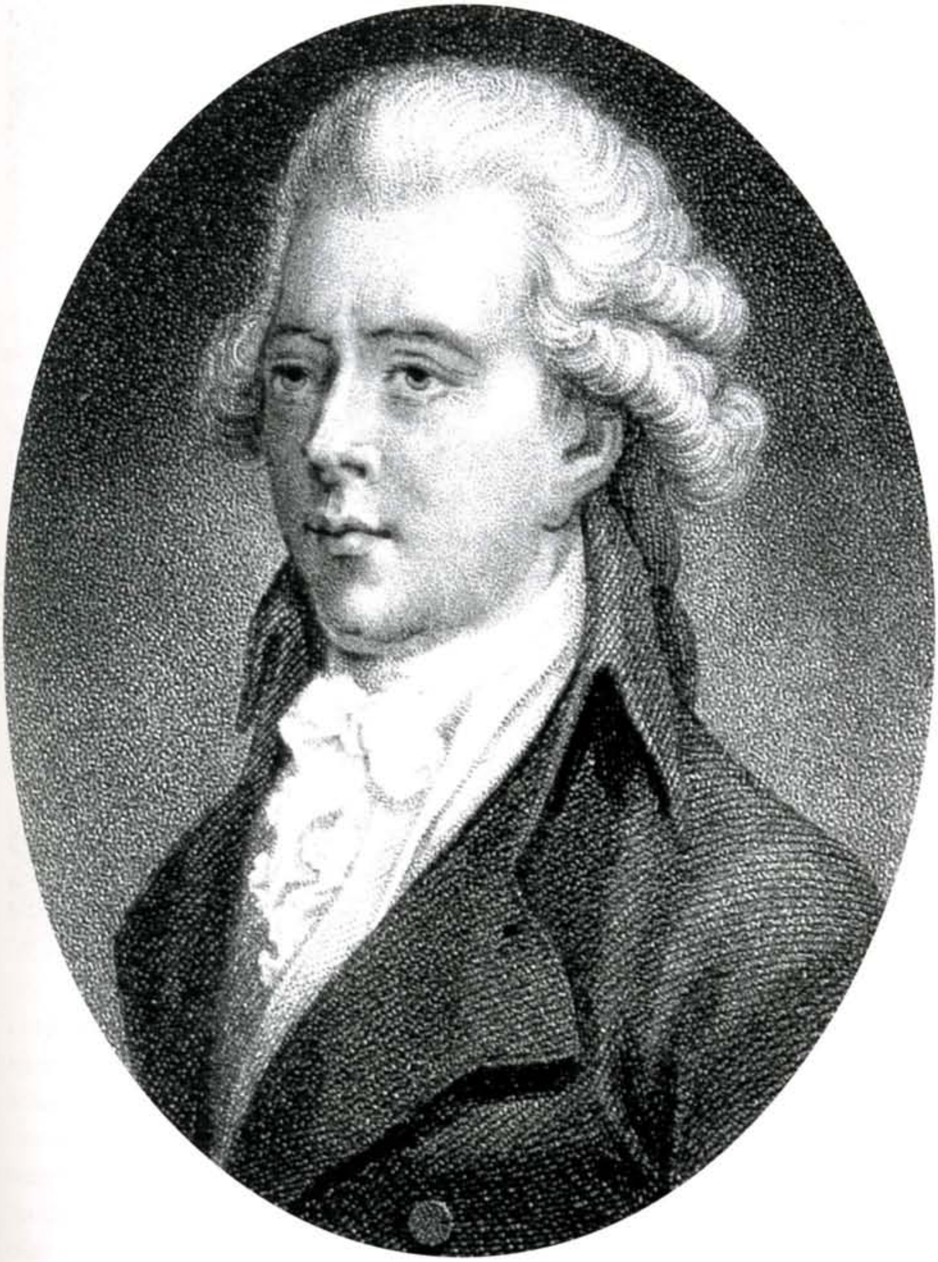
Dido in Despair! (London: Etching produced by James Gillray, artist and engraver, and H. Humphrey, publisher, 6 Feb, 1801). In one of James Gillray's most virulent satires, this caricature ridicules Lady Hamilton at a point when Nelson was relatively unpopular. Published shortly after the news that Parker and Hamilton would sail to the Baltic, the verse reads:

Ah, where, & ah where is my
gallant sailor gone?
He's gone to fight the Frenchmen,
for George upon the throne
He's gone to fight the Frenchmen,
t'loose t'other Arm & Eye,
And left me with the old Antique,
to lay me down & Cry.

(Royal Naval Museum)

develop a concordat with Pope Pius VII, to reorganize the French government to affirm his personal rule, to organize the territories under his control in Germany and Italy, and to use his naval resources to support recovering control of Santo Domingo in the West Indies from the Afro-American leader Toussaint l'Ouverture.

The Anglo-French peace negotiations and the subsequent peace agreement avoided a number of issues that eventually proved to be irritants to maintaining a stable peace in the future. The Peace of Amiens contained no provision that either protected British commerce or prevented further French overseas colonial growth. Additionally, it made no attempt to confirm the European status quo, failing to reaffirm the French boundaries that had been recognized in the separate Treaty of Lunéville which Austria had concluded, omitting recognition of the independence of the new satellite republics in Holland, Switzerland, and Lombardy, or dealing with the reorganization of Italy and Germany under Napoleon's influence. All these would become future issues, but these matters were momentarily obscured by immediate satisfaction with an interlude of peace and an initial feeling in Britain and in other European countries that they could all find a way to live peacefully with France, at least for a time.[5]



The Rt. Hon. William Pitt (London: Engraving by John Chapman, 1796). As Prime Minister from 1783 to February 1801, Pitt was largely responsible for nurturing the development of the Royal Navy during the decade of peace following the War of American Independence. By the time of the Wars of the French Revolution, the Navy was prepared, although a number of the early military efforts under Pitt's government were badly planned and executed. In February 1801, he resigned over domestic political issues in favour of his follower, Henry Addington, who served as Prime Minister until Pitt returned in May 1804 and remained in power through the Trafalgar campaign. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)

The Peace of Amiens attempted to utilize the long-standing 18th-century ideas of European balance-of-power politics to divide Europe into three main power blocks that could have prevented any of the major powers – Russia, France and Britain – from either completely dominating or threatening each other. Yet, it was a balance of power based around acceptance of Napoleonic France's hegemony within large parts of continental Europe.

Despite the potential for the Amiens settlement to create a stable peace for a time, there were several areas in Europe that remained potential flash points for renewed conflict. Among these were the Mediterranean and Near East regions, which Amiens could well have stabilized, if the treaty provisions had been carried out so that France evacuated Naples and handed Egypt back to the Turks; Britain evacuated its forces from Egypt and Malta, but kept Gibraltar; and Russia withdrew its squadron from the Mediterranean, but maintained a base in the Ionian Islands and a peacekeeping garrison to uphold Malta's neutrality.[6] In other areas, France controlled the entire southern shore of the Channel and its approaches in the Low Countries including the mouths of the Scheldt and the Rhine. Continental European markets were closed to British trade, both in the North and in the South. Overseas, British forces had made 25 conquests during the War of the Second Coalition, but all these were given up at Amiens, including the return of the Cape of Good Hope to the Netherlands and Martinique to France. By 1802, after nine years of warfare against France, Britain was exhausted and had gained nothing through the war.[7]

The failure of the Peace of Amiens and the renewal of war, first with Britain in 1803, and then with the Third Coalition in 1805, was clearly caused by Bonaparte and other French leaders, who continued to expand French military power in Europe and to encourage overseas expansion. As expressions of this, Bonaparte and some of his representatives gave clear indications of their long term ambitions to return to Egypt and to expand into other areas in North Africa, although they had no specific plans for doing this. Also, France showed an interest in Florida and other Spanish territories about the same time that she was selling the Louisiana Territory to the United States. In India, Bonaparte appointed a noted Anglophone to govern the French colonies there, while also ordering Rear-Admiral Denis Decrès, his Naval Minister, to expand the French Navy, all of which caused some concern in Britain. Even more disturbing were Bonaparte's political interventions into continental European affairs.[8]

Representative of what lay ahead in Europe, on 1 October 1801, the very day that Britain had signed the preliminaries for the Peace of Amiens, a plebiscite was held in the Netherlands on a new constitution based on the French model. Of the 416,619 voters who turned out, 16,771 voted in favor, while 52,219 voted against it and a stunning 347,629 abstained. The government declared that the abstentions and missing votes were 'tacit affirmations' and declared the new constitution as 'the will of people.'[9]

While some of Bonaparte's innovations were progressive and appropriate improvements for individual countries that came under his control, he made them in ways that aggravated relations with other powers, particularly Britain. In Switzerland, he used the 1800 Act of Mediation to render it neutral under French control, building on this over the next few years to bring Swiss troops into the French Army and announcing these changes in ways made to show them as demonstrations of French independence of British opinion, allowing no British residents in the country.[10]

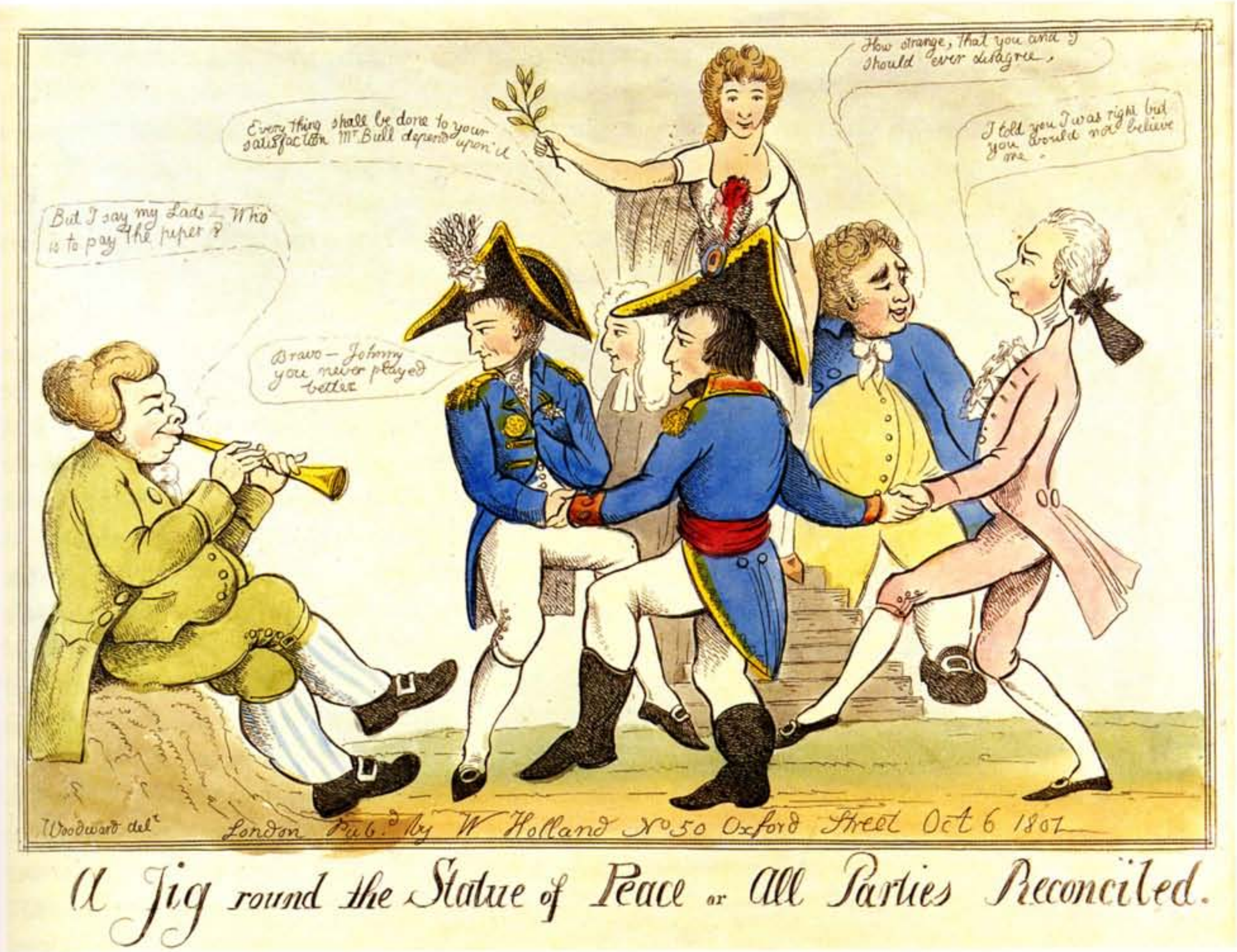
In Germany, Bonaparte created a territorial revolution between 1800 and 1803, by eliminating many political remnants of the Middle Ages, including 112 previously independent states, 41 free cities, and 66 ecclesiastical principalities.

While this was a major step toward the formation of modern Germany, the redistribution of lands for the benefit of Prussia, Bavaria and others was simultaneously an alteration to the European system that created a direct threat to Austria with associated indirect threats to Prussia, to Russia and to Britain. While Britain paid little immediate attention beyond her concern for Hanover, the new tsar of Russia, Alexander I, began to have broader concerns about finding ways to restrain his French ally from late 1802 onwards.

It Italy, Bonaparte's territorial innovations were very similar to what he had done in Germany, but, in contrast to Germany, the Italians clearly violated international agreements, particularly the recent 1801 Peace of Lunéville with Austria. Bonaparte's aggressive polices included the creation of the Italian Republic with himself as its president assuming direct control over the Ligurian Republic, transforming Tuscany into the Kingdom of Etruria, and annexing Elba and Piedmont into France. Immediately following this, Bonaparte ordered all these newly formed states to arms and to prepare for war.

In mid-1802, Bonaparte sent General Pierre-Louis Roederer on an intelligence mission to Austria and Hungary to gather information on the military situation

A Jig Round the Statue of Peace (London: Etching October 1801). This political cartoon shows opponents Nelson and Napoleon, Pitt and C.J. Fox, dancing in celebration of the recently concluded Peace of Amiens, with John Bull asking "Who shall pay the piper?" for all the unresolved difficulties it involved. (Royal Naval Museum)


How strange, that you and I should ever disagree,
Every thing shall be done to your satisfaction Mr Bull depend upon it
I told you I was right but you would not believe me.
But I say my Lads — Who is to pay the piper?
Bravo — Johnny you never played better
Woodward delt
London Pubd by W Holland No 50 Oxford Street Oct 6 1801
A Jig round the Statue of Peace or All Parties Reconciled.

there and to look for potential popular uprisings that might create an Austrian–Russian conflict in the Balkans. At the same time, Bonaparte urged the Italian Republic to form an army of Austrian deserters as a provocation to Austria and he also tried to use the Ionian Islands as a bone of contention between the two powers. In making these provocative moves, Bonaparte was trying to find ways that would distract Austria from opposing his moves in Germany and Italy, while also encouraging Russia to ally herself more closely with France.

Bonaparte's continual expansion of French military power created uneasiness, both in Britain and in Russia, but his actions by themselves fell short of starting a new war. In spite of aggressive behaviour, Bonaparte did not intend to start a war immediately and thought of waiting until 1805, when he anticipated that his alliance with Russia could result in supplying enough timber and naval stores to effectively rebuild the French Navy.[11] He was aware that both Russia and Britain were located on the periphery of Europe and that they shared the attitude that they could stand apart from continental quarrels, as long as they presented no immediate, direct, and intolerable threat to their own interests. This attitude was certainly a strong factor in the initial acceptance of the terms of the Peace of Amiens, but very quickly Russia began to sense a threat, although in a place in which Bonaparte had not yet consciously created one: along its southern borders and in the Near East. This was a traditional security concern for Russia, in which the recent acquisition and continuing retention of Georgia in the Caucasus played a part. Russia saw this broad region, with tribally dominated and weak powers such as the Persian and Ottoman empires, as its own sphere of influence. At the same time, some in Britain began to sense that Bonaparte's moves could become eventual threats to British interests in the West Indies and in the Indian subcontinent.

While such broad strategic and security issues were beginning to develop in reaction to French policy following the Peace of Amiens, Bonaparte was also involved in another effort: to control information, not only within France, but throughout Europe. Bonaparte had immediately imposed censorship in 1800, shortly after becoming First Consul, and entered on a major campaign to silence critical comment by limiting the number of periodicals. Going far beyond this and beyond any previous attempt at controlling information and political opinion, Bonaparte moved to control information across Europe through a triple approach. He organized an effort to control the opposition press that was being promoted outside France by French émigré journalists. Bonaparte targeted individual journalists, using bribery and coercion, to force publication of favourable opinion. As part of this, the French government made a special effort to observe the content and the circulation of these foreign journals. At the same time, Bonaparte orchestrated a diplomatic offensive against such journalists, attempting to have them either punished by foreign governments or extraditing them to France for libel proceedings.[12]

Between 1800 and 1803, the French government made repeated diplomatic complaints about the material that émigré journalists in Britain and the Channel

Islands were publishing. The initial reaction of the Addington government was to be conciliatory to these complaints, without going so far as to limit the freedom of the Press at home. The situation was exacerbated further on 9 August 1802, when the *Moniteur* in Paris published an article, thought to have been written by Napoleon himself, which accused the British government of bad faith in not controlling criticism of a peaceful, neighbouring state. The article went so far as to suggest that the British lacked a government with the capability to make its authority felt and, for that reason, should not even be considered a sovereign power.

Failing to understand the range of British sensitivities and outrage surrounding this matter, the French continued to press for stronger measures. The Addington government did some of the things that Bonaparte requested: removing the anti-Bonapartist Chouan plotters from Jersey in the Channel Islands, putting on trial the émigré journalist Peltier, and taking some informal steps to tell the proprietors of various pro-government British newspapers that it disapproved of them publishing criticism of Bonaparte. All this had some direct effect in meeting Bonaparte's demands, but it was not enough. Bonaparte thought that British government influence over newspaper opinion was the same as his own control of the press in France. In his eyes, British failures to obtain full and satisfactory results made them seem duplicitous. To British eyes, Bonaparte's demands went too far and became unreasonable intrusions.

The tensions and cultural misunderstandings between France and Britain over the press issue soon merged with the more conventional aspects of grand strategy, as the time came to execute portions of the Amiens agreement. Article 10 of the treaty required Britain to evacuate its forces from Malta and to return it to the Order of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem upon the election of a new grand master, whose control of the island would be guaranteed by the European powers. In March 1801, the previous grand master, Tsar Paul I, had been strangled by his courtiers, four of whom were Knights of Malta. His successor as Tsar, Alexander I, refused the office with the view that Malta and the Order of St John should return to local control. The Treaty of Amiens reflected the same aim and the British government made preparations to comply and withdraw its troops and control. In September 1802, Pope Pius VII attempted to confer the grand mastership on the Roman knight Bartolemeo Ruspoli. He refused to accept the appointment and it was not until February 1803 that a replacement was found in the Balì Giovanni Tommasi, who became the grand master through an irregular election procedure.[13]

The unsettled situation over the grand mastership created a delay in putting in place the provisions of the Peace of Amiens, but the delay was not the only issue that led to Malta becoming the spark that renewed war between France and Britain. Behind this, only Austria had offered to act as guarantors of Malta's independence; Malta's future was questionable, as Russia and the other major powers had declined to act as guarantors, but in August, British diplomats in Berlin were still trying to persuade Prussia to join in the guarantee so that the original settlement could proceed.

Eventually in November 1802, the Addington government made a formal diplomatic proposal to Bonaparte asking to adjust the terms of the Amiens agreement. In this, Britain proposed to accept French hegemony and acquisitions in Western Europe, including the territorial changes to Italy and Germany, but asked in return that Bonaparte withdraw his troops from both Switzerland and Holland while still maintaining political control over those countries, and that Britain retain Malta. At the same time, as a measure of good faith toward the general peace settlement, Britain ordered the evacuation of her troops from the Cape of Good Hope and the return of the colony to the Dutch.

Neither Addington's cabinet nor Bonaparte was willing to go to war immediately. Negotiations over the proposals continued for the next several months, while Bonaparte delayed and British representatives did not even mention such traditional British national interests as creating an 18th-century style balance of power in Europe, obtaining access to continental trading markets, or even objecting to the strategic threat created by French political and military control over the Southern Netherlands.

The British government was clearly attempting to appease Bonaparte, but at the same time asking to revise the Amiens settlement so that a more permanent arrangement could exist in Europe under Bonaparte's hegemony.[14] By mid-November 1802, British officials began to suspect that Russia and France were planning to join forces in dismembering the Ottoman Empire and the British ambassador in Paris was instructed not to make any agreement on evacuating Malta. In the British view, there were a number of accumulating indications that had slowly begun to cast doubt on Bonaparte's intentions.

Months earlier in June 1802, the British ambassador in Vienna had reported that Bonaparte had predicted that there would be a future war between France and Britain. In London, it was not clear why Russia was refusing to guarantee Malta's neutrality. In August, Bonaparte declared himself First Consul for life and, at the end of September, followed this with reports in the official French press that he had sent Colonel Horace-François Sébastiani on a special mission to Egypt. British observers were deeply concerned about a revival of French interest in the Near East and began to suspect some sort of connection between Russia's ambivalence over Malta and Sébastiani's mission. The French had, in fact, made some sort of proposal to Russia about a partition of interests in the area, but this found no acceptance in St Petersburg, where the Tsar and some of the senior ministers were slowly evolving an anti-French and pro-British viewpoint.[15]

However, it was in this context that the British ambassador in St Petersburg was among the first to advise London that Britain should retain Malta as a restraint against French and Russian encroachment into the Ottoman Empire. After a time, it began to be clear that Russia under its new Tsar was initially reacting against his father's earlier policies by trying to disengage from European politics and from the internal Russian political issues surrounding the Knights of Malta that had arisen during Tsar Paul's reign as grand master of the Order.

Meanwhile, on 16 November 1802, the government in London ordered the evacuation of British forces in Egypt, realizing that this was a necessary act to avoid risking war with Bonaparte over the failure to uphold this part of the Amiens agreement. The situation continued in this manner until the end of January 1803, with Britain showing gathering remorse, but still proceeding with the intention to honour its part of the Amiens agreement while hoping to modify it.

In Russia, on 1 February 1803, Tsar Alexander I told his ambassador to Britain, Simon Vorontsov: 'The wisest system for Russia is to remain at peace and concern itself with internal prosperity,' adding:

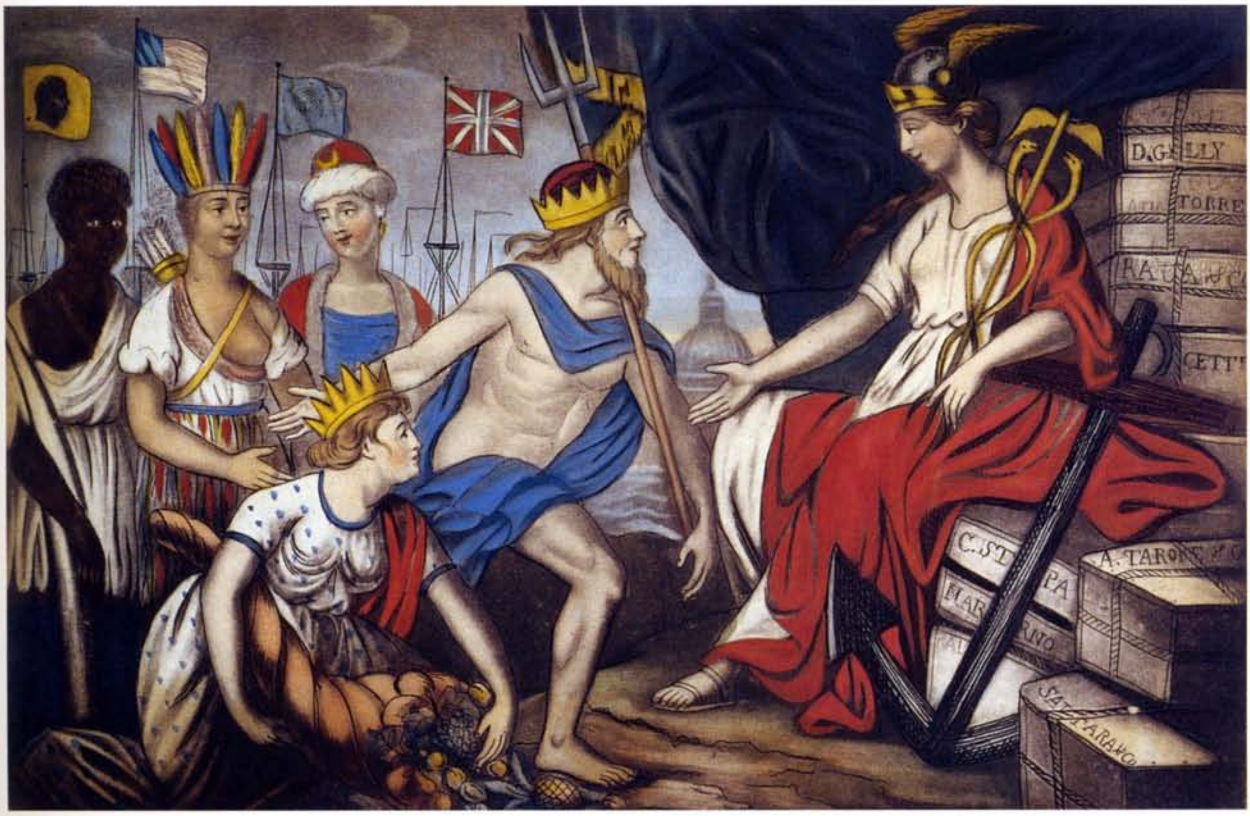
> One of the circumstances about which I could not remain indifferent would be an invasion of the Ottoman Empire by the French. It appears that the First Consul is continually preoccupied with this project... I am going to instruct Count Morkov [Russian Ambassador to France] to explain frankly to him that I would not in any case lend a hand to the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, which I believe to be an advantageous neighbour for Russia, and I desire to conserve it.[16]

This pattern of views was shattered both in London and in St Petersburg, when news arrived of the 30 January 1803 issue of the *Moniteur* in Paris, which

Neptune Introducing the Four Quarters of the World to Commerce (London: Mezzotint published by J. Hinton, March 1803). Illustrating the powerful sentiments in Britain for continuing peace with France, this print included the following verse:

Commerce & Traffic now receives increase
and Merchant's boldly venture not 'tis peace,
with Commerce fill'd they lofty cities shine,
and all the products of the Globe are thine.

(Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)



had published a report from Colonel Sébastiani on his mission to Egypt. In the open press, Sébastiani scoffed at the effectiveness of British forces in Egypt and reported that the North African states, Syria, and the Ionian Islands were all ripe fields for French military expansion, even going on to estimate that an army of 10,000 French troops would be sufficient to re-conquer Egypt.[17] This report, along with the concentration of French troops still in Italy (in itself a violation of the Treaty of Amiens) and with French persistence in continuing to have in its army organization an 'Army of Egypt', left deep suspicions among officials in London and St Petersburg.[18]

In light of these French moves and a report that the Tsar had advised the British not to evacuate Malta, although Russia did not openly break with France at this point, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Hawkesbury, instructed Ambassador Whitworth in Paris to advise the French government that British forces would withdraw from Malta only when the government in London was satisfied that the French had no plans to return to Egypt. It is probable that Napoleon had intended the publication of Sébastiani's report in the *Moniteur* to intimidate and to bully the British, just as he continued, at the same time, to make diplomatic attacks on the British government over the press issue during the trial of the émigré journalist Peltier that was simultaneously taking place in London during February 1803. The immediate responses from French Foreign Minister Talleyrand to reassure British leaders about Bonaparte's honorable intentions, suggests that there were cooler heads in Paris, but First Consul Bonaparte continued to make provocative comments. On 18 February he personally told British Ambassador Lord Whitworth that he could have landed an army of 25,000 in Egypt and the 4,000-man British force would have been helpless to oppose it.[19] Although the French ambassador to London reported that the British government did not want to go to war, citing the conviction of the journalist Peltier as evidence of British good faith in maintaining peace, Addington's ministry decided that it was time for King George III to make a clear statement to Parliament about the growing crisis in early March in which the House of Commons was told:

> that, whilst they partake of his majesty's continuance of the peace, he may rely, with perfect confidence on their public spirit and liberality, to enable his majesty to adopt such measures as circumstances may appear to require for supporting the honour of his crown, and the essential interests of his people.[20]

Bonaparte reacted violently to this statement. During a reception for the foreign diplomatic corps in Paris, Bonaparte lashed out at the British ambassador for all to hear, leaving them all silent in astonishment. As he slammed the door on his way out of the reception room in the Tuileries, he told Lord Whitworth, 'We shall be fighting in two weeks. Malta – or war!'[21] British leaders replied cautiously and calmly to this, opening negotiations with the First Consul through his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, who, with Talleyrand, personally seemed to be interested in maintaining peace. These discussions were repeatedly rebuffed by Bonaparte. On 26 April, the British government gave an ultimatum to the French: 1: Malta must be controlled by Britain for 10 years; 2: Lampedusa Island must be ceded to Britain by Naples; 3: Holland must be evacuated within a month; 4: When France made suitable provisions for the King of Sardinia and the Helvetian Republic, then Britain would recognize the Italian and Ligurian Republics.

In response to this, Russia offered to mediate the Maltese question, but in a meeting of the Council of State at St Cloud on 11 May, both the Russian offer of mediation and the British demands were rejected and the decision was made for war. Only Talleyrand and Joseph Bonaparte supported the peace proposals. On the next day, British diplomats left Paris for England. En route, Talleyrand sent a proposal for Malta to come under Russia, Austria, or Prussia, but Whitworth rejected this as merely a delaying tactic. Whitworth arrived in England from Calais on 17 May and, on the following day, George III declared war on the French Republic.

The convergence of events in the context of mutual misunderstanding helped to drive both France and Britain toward a renewal of war that neither were fully prepared to conduct.[22] As one historian has concluded, it was not the traditional geo-strategic reasons that drove Britain and France to renew war in 1803. 'The British went to war simply because they could not stand being further challenged and humiliated by Bonaparte; France went to war because Bonaparte could not stop doing it.'[23]

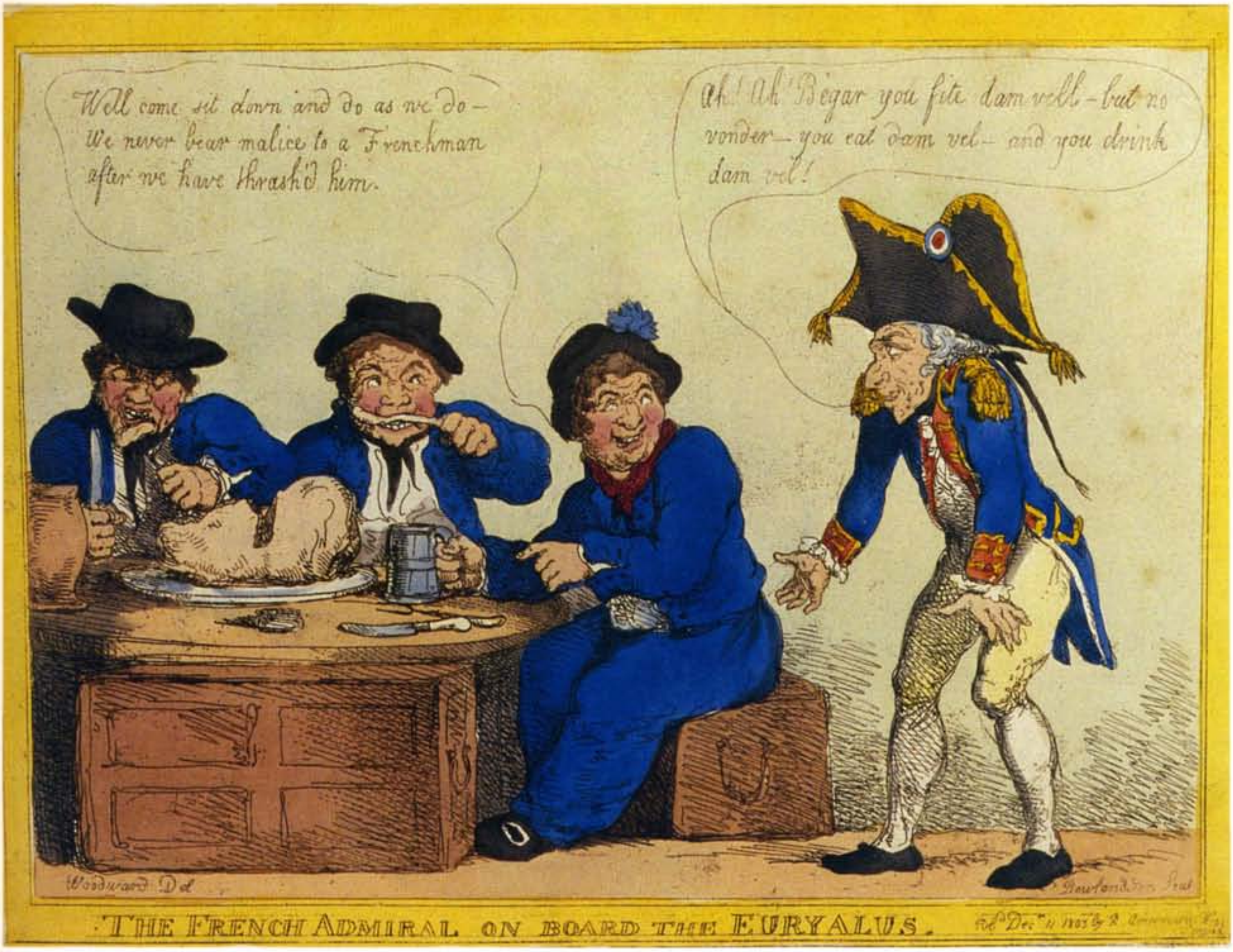
THE GENERAL STRATEGIC SITUATION, 1803–05

In military and naval terms, neither Britain nor France was fully prepared for war. There was a serious shortage of muskets for the British Army and most of those available were needed for home defence. Starting from a point at which there were serious shortages, British arms production was immediately pushed forward at Birmingham, and, additionally, the Ordnance Board began to produce its own muskets at the Tower of London. These were but the beginnings of a huge arms production, but it would take several years to bear fruit. The Navy rapidly mobilized, jumping from 32 ships-of-the-line in service in the spring of 1803 to 72 in July. While the ships that lay in 'ordinary' (reserve) could be readily brought in to service, the first problem was finding enough men to man them quickly and secondly to repair and maintain them while in service. On average it took more than five months to repair a major warship in this period, supplies of timber and stores were scarce, and there were bureaucratic difficulties over the prices of supplies. At this point, the dockyards were unable to respond fully to the sudden demands on them that the renewal of war had imposed, a situation that demanded rapid reform in this area.[24]

At the outbreak of the war, Britain was largely isolated diplomatically, and operating only with increasing indications that Russia seemed to be turning against France. When Britain declared war, the government did so without any firm commitment of assistance from any other country. In broad terms, the British government seems to have entered the war on the assumption that Britain could win a prolonged war of attrition fought in the realm of naval and maritime commercial warfare. This would suggest that British leaders believed that, crippled by loss of its maritime trade and unable to invade the British Isles, France would eventually face financial collapse and this would engender internal revolt against Bonaparte. As these forces began to take effect on France, they anticipated Bonaparte would turn on the parts of Europe that France did not yet fully control. This, in turn, would create the basis for a new coalition against France that would ultimately defeat it. In 1803, such a strategy rested on much wishful thinking and high risks. It was undertaken, too, without regard to the thought that continental Europe might not react in the same way that the British did, and continental Europe might find reason to blame Britain for forcing Bonaparte back into a war that would bring more destruction on them than it would on Britain. The British government, however, paid little heed to such thoughts in its diplomacy and tended to ignore Austria and Prussia, which would naturally bear the direct military brunt of Bonaparte's attacks, and to focus instead on the periphery of Europe, looking more toward Sweden and on Russia for assistance.[25]

Bonaparte had enormous strategic and military advantages over Britain in the period 1803–05, despite the fact that he had yet to organize Europe fully for the renewal of war. He had, readily at hand, a large coalition of his own, in the form of the satellite countries that he had established and allies within his sphere of influence. Thus, the Italian and Batavian Republics were immediately brought in to the war. Switzerland quickly joined Bonaparte in September and Spain in October 1803. Those who wished to stand aside and remain, were simply invaded and occupied, such as General Mortier's invasion of Hanover in May 1803 with a corps of 25,000 troops and the nearly simultaneous occupation by General St Cyr's army of the southern Neapolitan ports of Taranto, Otranto and Brindisi, establishing the potential for a direct French threat to Sicily, Greece and Egypt. With such operational capacities, Bonaparte was able not only to strengthen his strategic position but also to force the costs of warfare on areas of Europe outside of France, thereby preserving his political base at home at the expense of others. His sale of the Louisiana territory to the United States, although leaving his commitments on its purchase from Spain incomplete, succeeded in raising money for the war effort against Britain, while it removed the need to use French resources to defend it.

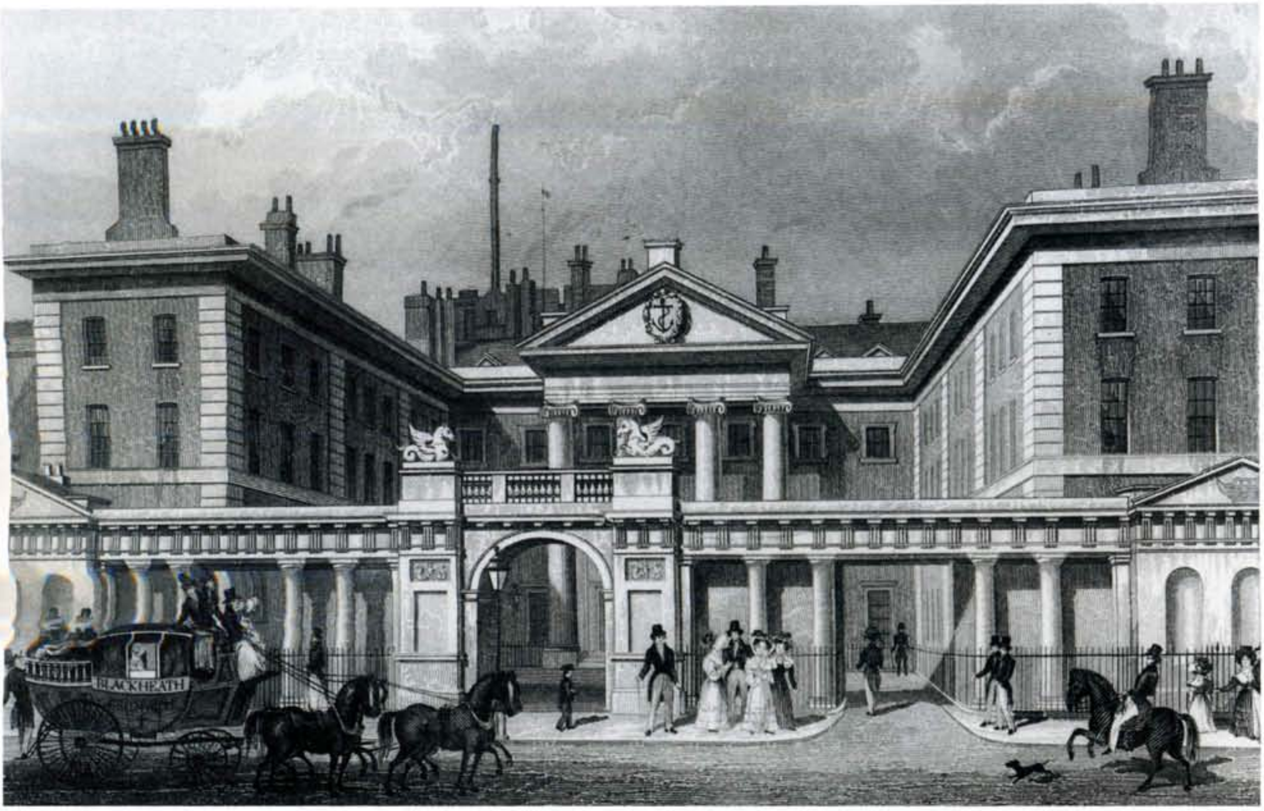
Russia continued its attempt to remain on good terms with France, while at the same time attempting to broker mediation between Britain and Bonaparte over the Malta issue, it strove to remain beyond the conflict, not faced by any direct threat from Bonaparte. With some considerable insight, Alexander I and his advisors began to propose solutions that involved a fundamental new approach to European affairs in which it was no longer individual great power


Well come sit down and do as we do – We never bear malice to a Frenchman after we have thrash'd him.
Ah! Ah! Begar you fite dam vell – but no vonder – you eat dam vel – and you drink dam vel!
Woodward Del
Rowlandson Sculp
THE FRENCH ADMIRAL ON BOARD THE EURYALUS.
Pub Dec 11 1803

The French Admiral on Board the Euryalus (London: Etching produced by George M. Woodward, artist, engraved by Thomas Rowlandson, and published by Rudolph Ackermann, 11 Dec 1803). In this caricature, the French admiral's comment to the British sailor that 'you fight dam vell and drink dam vell' suggests the widespread belief that British seaman had higher morale than their French counterparts. *Euryalus* , a 36-gun fifth rate, was just launched at Buckler's Hard in June 1803. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)

interests that provided the pivot, but rather a guarantee for the independence of both large and small states. Despite its foresight into the ultimate solution to the broadest European issues, both Britain and France rejected these ideas. At this point, Bonaparte was motivated by his burning desire to humiliate the British and to exclude them from Europe. Bonaparte rejected the Russian proposals since they failed to recognize his hegemony, while Britain rejected the Russian proposals because they were limited to the Maltese issue and did not deal with the additional questions that had arisen on other areas of concern to Britain.

While this was going on, Bonaparte ordered the establishment of encampments of the French Army, numbering between 90,000 and 130,000 along the coast to prepare to invade Britain from Holland, Ghent, St Omer, Compiègne, St-Malo and Bayonne, with smaller encampments elsewhere. At the same time, Bonaparte ordered the readying of some 2,000 craft to sail from Bolougne, Étaples and Ambelteuse by November 1803. In hindsight the plan had such little practicability to it that historians have debated whether or not it was entirely a ruse to mask a military move in Central Europe. Despite all the serious doubts that do arise from a careful consideration of Bonaparte's practical arrangements



The Admiralty from an engraving by J. Tingle after Thomas H. Shepherd. The Admiralty building in Whitehall housed the London offices of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. The key officials located here, with the dates of appointment were:

First Lord:
19 February 1801:
John Jervis, Earl of St Vincent
15 May 1804:
Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville
2 May 1805:
Charles Middleton, Lord Barham

First Naval Lord
19 February 1801:
Sir Thomas Troubridge
15 May 1804:
James Gambier

Admiralty Secretary
3 March 1795:
Sir Evan Nepean
21 January 1804:
William Marsden
(Mary Evans Picture Library)

for the success of this enterprise, there is considerable evidence to suggest that Bonaparte was entirely serious about it.[26]

In the first months of the war, the Royal Navy took up blockading positions off the French coast to keep the French Navy in port, where it could not challenge British uses of the sea. In the Atlantic and Bay of Biscay, Admiral Sir William Cornwallis took up station off Brest; Rear-Admiral Sir Edward Pellew caught the French Santo Domingo Squadron in port at Ferrol; Rear-Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood patrolled off Rochefort, and, in the Mediterranean, Vice-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson watched Toulon. Overseas, British forces moved quickly to make up for the positions that they had voluntarily given up at Amiens, taking St Lucia, Tobago, Berbice, Demara, and Esquibo in 1803.

The presence of the French Army in a position to launch an amphibious assault, whether it was practical or not, created a serious threat that required home defence, particularly in those areas that directly faced the French army on the opposite shores in Kent and Sussex. The British saw themselves as being encircled by French forces, who could choose a variety of approaches to attack, not only the obvious threat directly across the Channel, but anywhere that amphibious landing forces from Brest, Lorient, and elsewhere in the Bay of Biscay could be readily embarked for a landing in Britain or Ireland. This required a mass mobilization of militia and volunteers and transporting about one third of that entire force from places throughout the country to positions south of London, while at the same time providing adequately for the need to defend Ireland and to maintain an effective land defensive capability along the entire coast of the United Kingdom.[27]

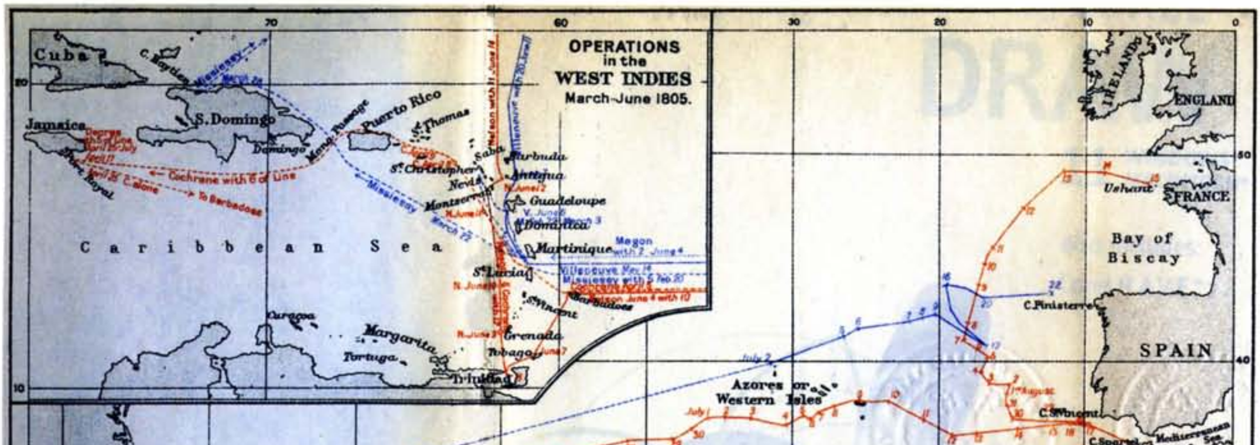
The main strategic idea here was to maintain a defensive perimeter around the country that would prevent French forces from establishing a base of operations on British soil. In a thoughtful consideration of Bonaparte's new approach to military tactics, British leaders prepared to meet French mobility and tactical surprise by cutting off its lines of supply from France and preventing its easy movement, through establishing a numerical superiority over the invading force obtained through trained British army units operating with civilian militia and volunteer auxiliaries.

Yet, Britain still faced France alone. In the years between 1803 and 1805, Britain lacked the military resources to put an expeditionary army of her own on the continent. It would take deeply involved and tortuous diplomacy across developing events in Europe to create a Third Coalition that could effectively challenge Bonaparte's military might on the Continent. During 1803, Bonaparte had been successful in getting Portugal, and then Spain to provide subsidies to France. In the same period, none of the other European states were initially willing to join Britain in a war against France, but some important seeds had been sown. One of the major events that played a role in turning many countries against Napoleon occurred almost simultaneously with his proclamation as emperor: the abduction of the 32-year old royalist Duc d'Enghien, the sole heir of the ancient Bourbon-Condé family, from neutral Baden, and his subsequent execution at Vincennes on 20 March. This was followed soon afterwards by Bonaparte's proclamation of himself as the Emperor Napoleon in May 1804 and his spectacular self-coronation with the crown of Charlemagne at Notre Dame in Paris on 2 December 1804. On the surface, Austria and others stayed either quietly neutral or completely in Napoleon's thrall.[28]

This situation began to change only very slowly in late 1804. By then, the Addington government had been succeeded by William Pitt's return to power in May 1804. By October, Britain was still alone and facing a larger coalition after British warships captured Spanish ships carrying gold from the Americas, forcing a break in diplomatic relations between Spain and Britain. In January 1805, Spain declared war against Britain, bringing Spanish naval resources to join Napoleon's fleet.

Finally, after lengthy negotiations, Britain and Russia were able to come to an agreement and to sign an alliance in April 1805 as the first step in the new coalition. In effect, Britain and Russia agreed that, between them, they should direct the war in Europe, decide on the war aims and regulate the peace that followed, while Austria would be persuaded, within four months, to bear the brunt of the land fighting for the two allies and to provide more than half the troops for a coalition army. The two new allies disagreed over many of the details as well as in the broad issues of how, precisely, they would share the burdens and benefits of their alliance. These disputes nearly caused the alliance

Nelson's Chase of Villeneuve, 12 May–15 August 1805


OPERATIONS
in the
WEST INDIES
March-June 1805.
Cuba
Jamaica
S. Domingo
Puerto Rico
St. Thomas
Saba
Barbuda
Antigua
St. Christopher
Nevis
Montserrat
Guadeloupe
Dominica
Martinique
St. Lucia
St. Vincent
Barbadoes
Grenada
Tobago
Trinidad
Margarita
Tortuga
Curaçoa
Caribbean Sea
Azores or Western Isles
Madeira
Canary Isles
Cape Verde Isles
Curieux reported V. here June 19
IRELAND
ENGLAND
Ushant
FRANCE
Bay of Biscay
C. Finisterre
SPAIN
C. St. Vincent
C. Spartel
Mediterranean Sea
MOROCCO
AFRICA
SOUTH AMERICA
NELSON'S CHASE OF VILLENEUVE
from William Faden's map
"copied from his Lordship's original MS. and special directions."
Published Aug. 12th 1807.
Villeneuve's track from Desbrière.
British operations shown in red.
French " " " blue.
GEORGE PHILIP & SON LTD
THE LONDON GEOGRAPHICAL INSTITUTE

The opening of the Trafalgar Campaign was marked by Villeneuve's escape with the French fleet from under Nelson's blockade of Toulon to join with the Spanish squadron under Gravina at Cadiz, followed by Nelson's subsequent chase of the Franco-Spanish fleet to the West Indies and back. (Reproduced from Julian S. Corbett, *The Campaign of Trafalgar*, Longmans, Green, & Co., London [1910], facing p. 154)

to fail ratification, but Napoleon's transformation of the Republic of Italy into a Kingdom with himself as its hereditary king and his aggressive annexation of Genoa into metropolitan France saved the Anglo-Russian agreement, bringing the two allies back into concert with one another at the last moment, and causing Russia to break its relationship with France.

With the agreement between them made and ratified, Britain and Russia pushed together to get Austria to accede to their coalition. Some months earlier, in November 1804, Austria had signed a provisional, defensive alliance with Russia, but not with the idea of using it to attack France. In Austrian eyes, it was meant to protect Austria from French incursions and to provide assistance if France attacked her. Austria proceeded to try to involve Prussia in the Austro-Russian Alliance, but this attempt at allaying the long-standing Austro-Prussian rivalry failed. When the terms of the Anglo-Russian agreement

Calder's Action, 22 July and the Great Concentration at Ushant

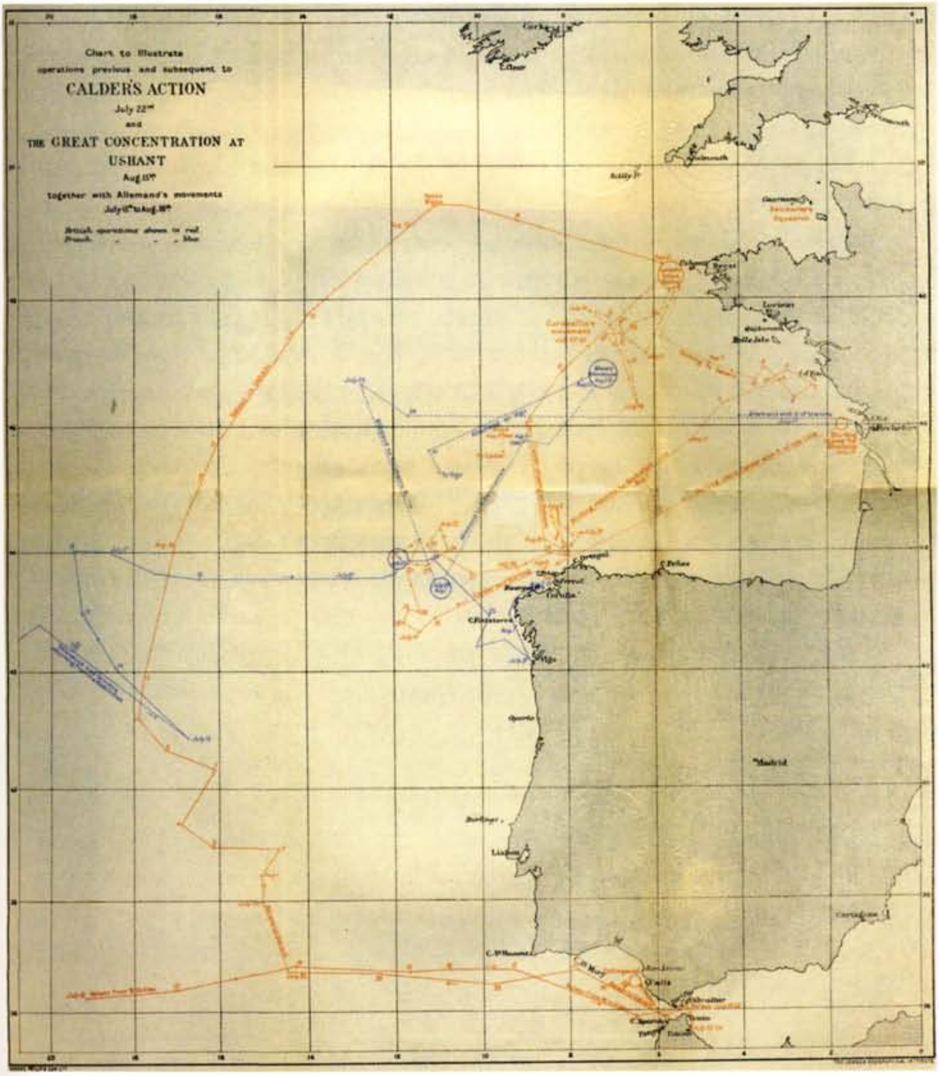


Chart to Illustrate
operations previous and subsequent to
CALDER'S ACTION
July 22nd
and
THE GREAT CONCENTRATION AT
USHANT
Aug 15th
together with Allemand's movements
British operations shown in red
French - - - - blue
Scilly
Madrid
Lisbon
Oporto
Vigo
Ferrol
Coruña
Berlingas
Cartagena
Gibraltar

Vice-Admiral Sir Robert Calder with 15 ships of the line engaged Villeneuve and Gravina's 20 ships off Finisterre, as they returned from the West Indies. To support Calder, Rear-Admiral Charles Stirling raised his blockade of Rochefort, allowing Allemand to put to sea with five French ships of the line. After the inconclusive action with Calder, the Franco-Spanish forces gathered at Vigo and then moved to Ferrol and later, Coruña. Then, Nelson moved north from the Straits of Gibraltar to join Cornwallis and Calder off Brest, making a concentration of 36 ships to block the Franco-Spanish fleet from either joining Ganteaume's Brest squadron or entering the Channel. (Reproduced from Julian S. Corbett, *The Campaign of Trafalgar*, Longmans, Green, and Co., London [1910], facing p. 184)

were finally revealed to Austria, statesmen in Vienna were deeply shocked and a number of them thought the role that Russia and Britain had made for them to be disastrous. Yet, at the same time, nearly all agreed that if war with France were inevitable then it would have to be fought offensively. Finally, in the face of a French ultimatum to disarm and declare its neutrality, Austria saw that its only course of action if it wanted to remain independent was to opt to join the Third Coalition. On 8 August 1804, in reaction against Napoleon's continual threats and pressures, Austria finally stepped away from her neutral position and signed a modified form of the Anglo-Russian agreement to join the Third Coalition. It provided that Britain would pay an annual subsidy of £1,250,000 for every 100,000 troops that actually took the field, although Pitt's government indicated that there would be an approximately £5 million combined total limit for the military support of Austria and Russia. Following Austria's accession to the coalition, Sweden broke with both France and neutral Prussia and after a series of negotiations finally agreed on 3 October 1805 to join the Third Coalition. British subsidies supported the Swedish troops to be sent to join the proposed 400,000-man predominantly Austrian army and Sweden formally declared war against France on 31 October. [29]

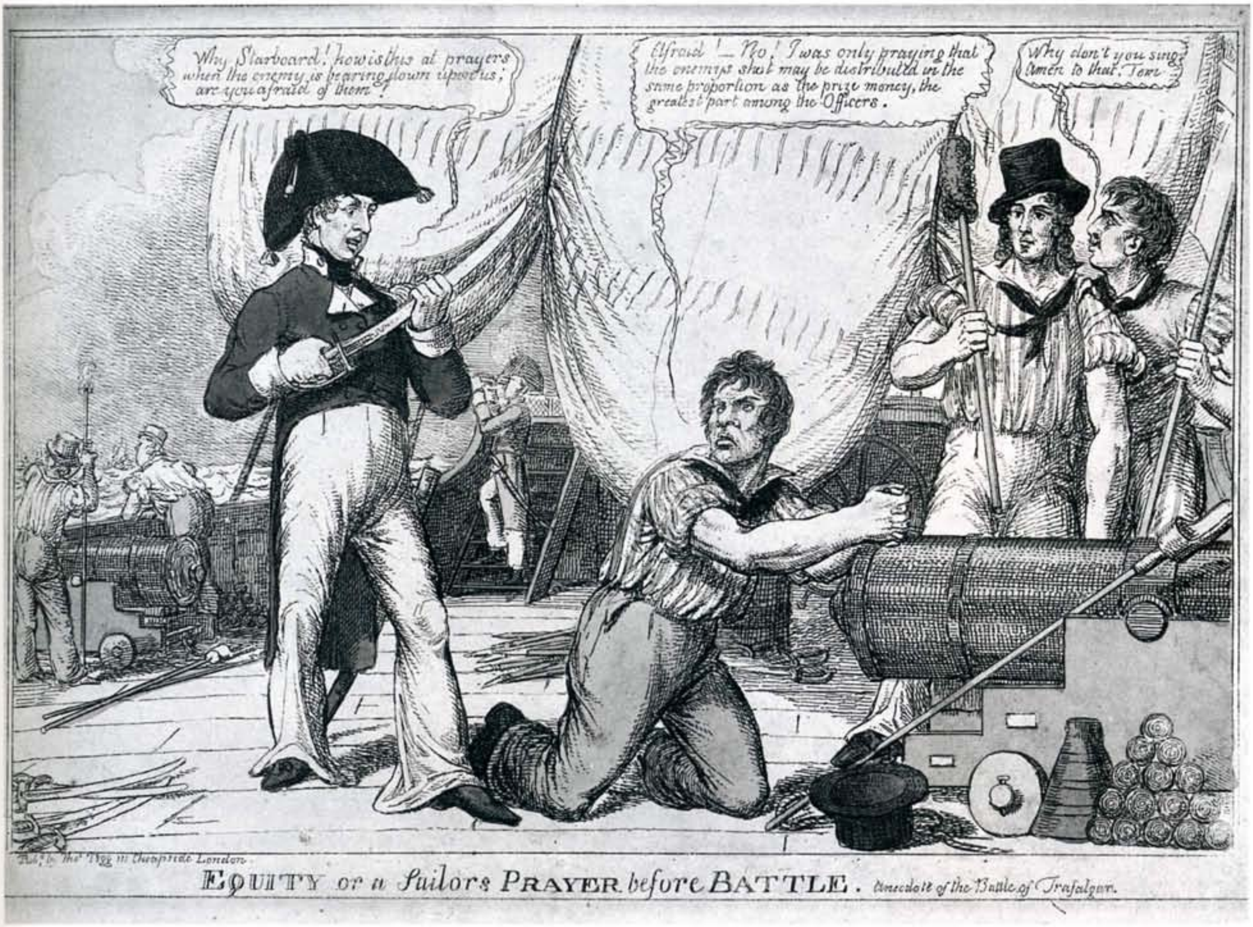
Meanwhile, the slow growth of the Third Coalition had allowed Napoleon to gather even more allies. In a direct reaction to the threat created by Austria's entry in the coalition, Bavaria joined France in late August and she was soon joined at Napoleon's side by Baden in September and Württemberg in October, while Prussia's very effective army remained neutral despite calls from both sides. It was clearly in Napoleon's interest that Prussia was either on his side or remained neutral. To ensure it, French troops occupied neighbouring Cleves.

As war broke out on the Continent, Napoleon clearly continued to maintain his advantage over the Third Coalition. The alliance that Napoleon had forcefully created among the reluctant southern German states gave him full control of the Danube River and an open avenue to meet the threat from Austria. Meanwhile, Russia moved to support her own interests in the Near East and to directly replace Napoleon's influence in the region with the Tsar's. While expanding his own power in the Caucasus and in Iran, Tsar Alexander obtained promises of British military and naval support to protect the Ottoman Empire from the French.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR OF THE THIRD COALITION

The outbreak of the war on the Continent in the late summer and autumn of 1805, although it had taken nearly three years to create, provided the grand strategic setting in which the battle of Trafalgar took place. The Coalition laid a plan of operations on the Continent that had three parts to it. First, an Anglo-Russian corps from Corfu and Malta would land in southern Italy, while a 90,000-man Austrian army under the Archduke Charles attacked French fortifications on the Mincio River to recapture parts of Italy that had formerly been under Habsburg control, and the Archduke John held Austrian positions in the Tyrol with 20,000 men. The second part of the plan was to take place simultaneously as the Archduke Ferdinand and General Mack invaded Bavaria and moved to hold a defensive position on the Inn River near Braunau. Here, Marshall Kutusov with 35,000 Russian troops would join up with them in mid-October 1805. After Archduke Charles defeated the French in Italy, the army under Ferdinand, Mack, and Kutusov would move north to the upper Rhine valley to defeat the French located there, while another Russian corps was to land in Pomerania, where it would be joined with the Swedish troops, and then march on Hanover.

Meanwhile, Napoleon was still concentrating on his plan to invade England, but this was stymied not only by its fundamental practical faults, but also by his need to have at least temporary naval supremacy in the Channel to allow his transports to sail. Napoleon went through a rapidly changing series of naval plans to bring this about. In terms of numbers, the total warships under his control would make a fleet that was superior to what Britain could put to sea. Napoleon's basic problem was that these ships were widely scattered in ports blockaded by the Royal Navy: Toulon, Cartagena, Cadiz, Ferrol, Rochefort, Brest and the Texel. The essential challenge was to unite them into a single force that could act together in battle. Napoleon repeatedly made the faulty assumption that when he ordered these ships to sail, they could do what he said and evade the blockading enemy ships in whatever conditions of weather, wind and tide that might exist.[30] In a confusing and rapidly changing series of orders and counter-orders, Napoleon repeatedly ordered his admirals to take their ships to sea in the summer and autumn of 1805. He had two objects in mind. One was, in conjunction with privateers, to attack and destroy British shipping around the world and so to damage the British war economy that was subsidizing military opposition. Here, two of Napoleon's admirals had some success. Missiessy had managed to sail to the West Indies, where his ships did some effective damage to British commerce. Then, Admiral Pierre de Villeneuve was able to slip out of


Why Starboard! how is this at prayers when the enemy is bearing down upon us; are you afraid of them?
Afraid! — No! I was only praying that the enemys shot may be distributed in the same proportion as the prize money, the greatest part among the Officers.
Why don't you sing Amen to that, Tom
Pub. by Thos Tegg 111 Cheapside London
EQUITY or a Sailors PRAYER before BATTLE. Anecdote of the Battle of Trafalgar.

Equity or a Sailor's Prayer (London: Etching produced by Thomas Rowlandson, artist, and published by Thomas Tegg, 1806). This sailor's prayer that the enemy's shot be distributed like 'prize money, the greatest part among the officers,' suggests much about the views of the ordinary seaman. (Royal Naval Museum)

Napoleon waited in vain at the Headquarters of the Army of England at Boulogne for Villeneuve to join Ganteaume off Brest and to enter the Channel. On 10 August, Villeneuve left Ferrol, first sailing west as if initially reaching for Brest. Deciding this was not feasible, he fell back on contingency orders to concentrate his forces at Cadiz. Meanwhile, Allemand continued to try to find and join Villeneuve, while Calder pursued Villeneuve and joined Collingwood off Cadiz, blocking entry into the Mediterranean and any attempt of the French to interfere with Anglo-Russian military plans in Italy. (Reproduced from Julian S. Corbett, The *Campaign of Trafalgar*, Longmans, Green, and Co., London [1910], facing p. 254)

Calder's Retreat to Ushant and Return in Pursuit of Villeneuve

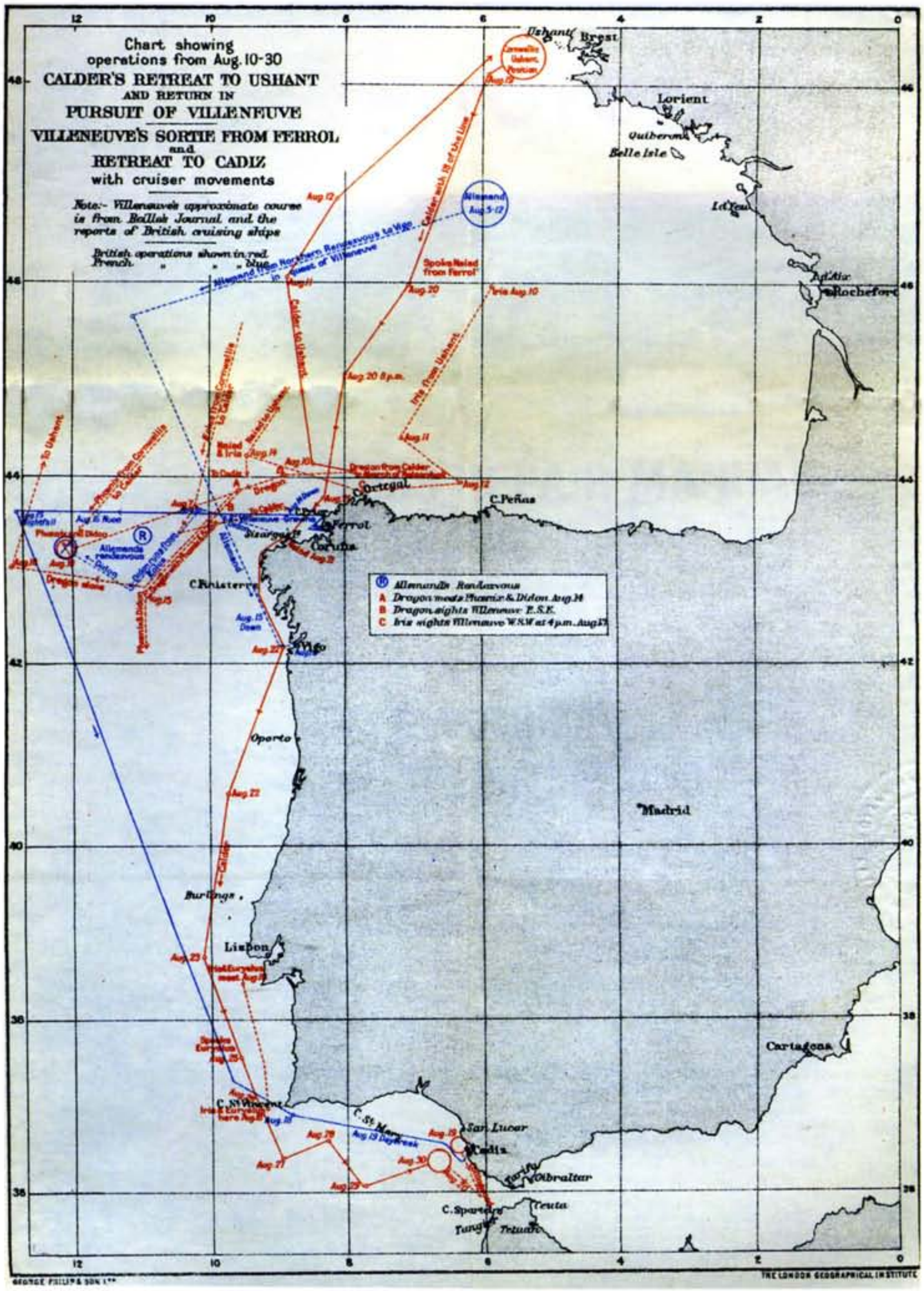


Chart showing
operations from Aug. 10-30
CALDER'S RETREAT TO USHANT
AND RETURN IN
PURSUIT OF VILLENEUVE
VILLENEUVE'S SORTIE FROM FERROL
and
RETREAT TO CADIZ
with cruiser movements
Note:- Villeneuve's approximate course is from Ballish Journal and the reports of British cruising ships
British operations shown in red.
French " " " blue
Allemand's Rendezvous
A Dragon meets Phœnix & Didon Aug. 14
B Dragon sights Villeneuve E.S.E.
C Iris sights Villeneuve W.S.W at 4 p.m. Aug. 17
Ushant
Brest
Lorient
Quiberon
Belle Isle
Ile d'Yeu
Ile d'Aix
Rochefort
C. Ortegal
C. Peñas
Ferrol
Coruña
Sisargas
C. Finisterre
Vigo
Oporto
Burlings
Lisbon
Madrid
Cartagena
C. St. Vincent
C. St. Mary
San Lucar
Cadiz
Tarifa
Gibraltar
C. Spartel
Tangier
Ceuta
Tetuan
Allemand Aug. 5-12
Spoke Naiad from Ferrol
Iris Aug. 10
Aug. 12
Aug. 20
Aug. 20 8 p.m.
Aug. 22
Aug. 23
Aug. 27
Aug. 29
Aug. 30
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
48
46
44
42
40
38
36
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Toulon momentarily. Looking for more effective voyages, Napoleon ordered Villeneuve to sail to the West Indies in the hope that the Royal Navy would follow, leaving the Channel unguarded. Yet, this plan was not entirely successful, as Admiral Cornwallis kept the Brest squadron blockaded and Admiral Ganteaume was unable to lead Cornwallis's ships away to the West Indies or to

Chart to illustrate Operations to Intercept Allemand

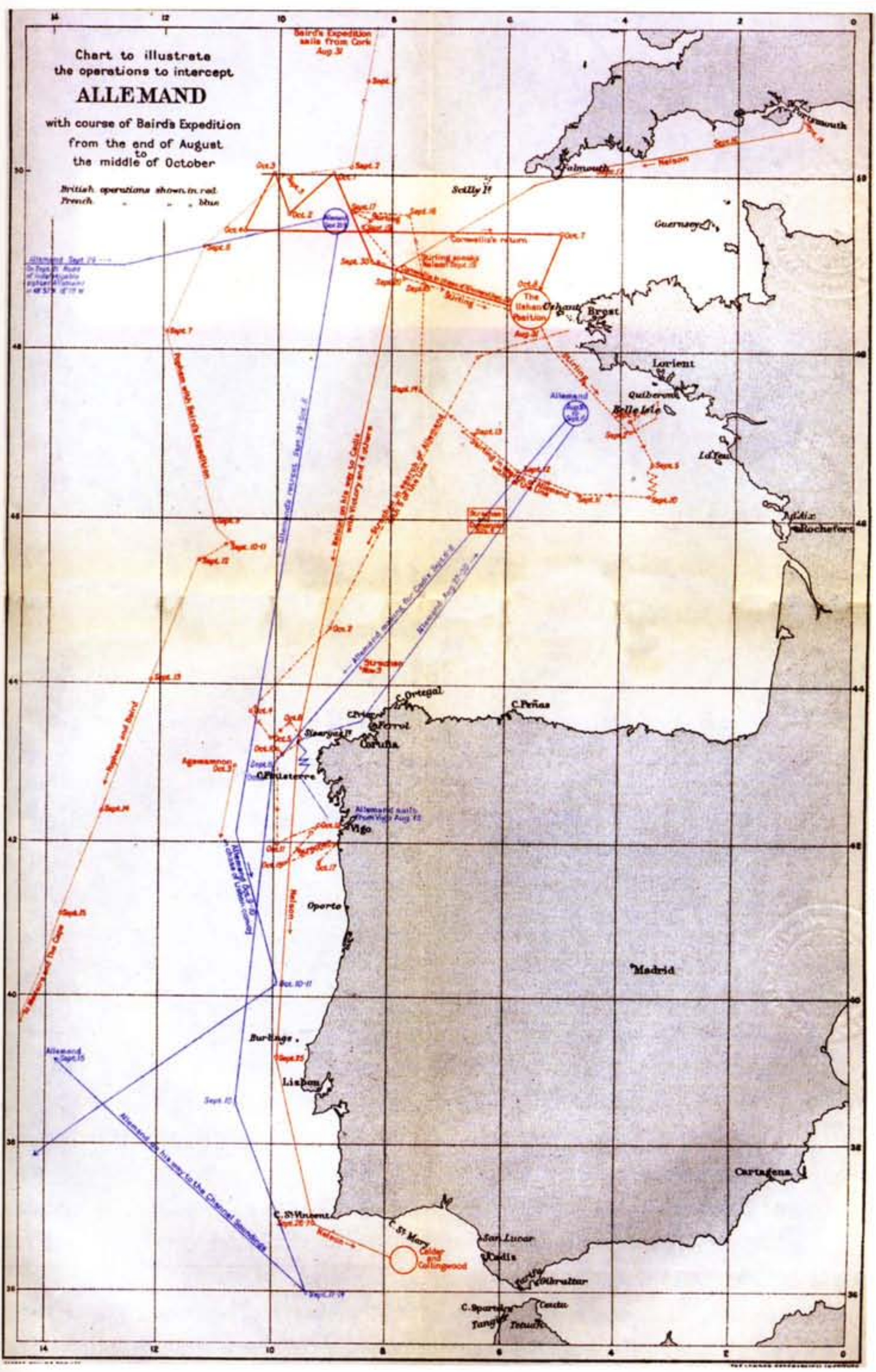
Chart to illustrate
the operations to intercept
ALLEMAND
with course of Baird's Expedition
from the end of August
to
the middle of October
British operations shown in red
French " " blue
Baird's Expedition sails from Cork Aug. 31
Scilly I
Falmouth
Nelson
Portsmouth
Guernsey
Ushant
Brest
The Ushant Position
Lorient
Quiberon
Belle Isle
Allemand
Aix
Rochefort
C. Ortegal
C. Peñas
Ferrol
Coruña
C. Finisterre
Vigo
Oporto
Madrid
Burlings
Lisbon
C. St. Vincent
C. St. Mary
San Lucar
Cadiz
Calder and Collingwood
Gibraltar
Cartagena
C. Spartel
Ceuta
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14
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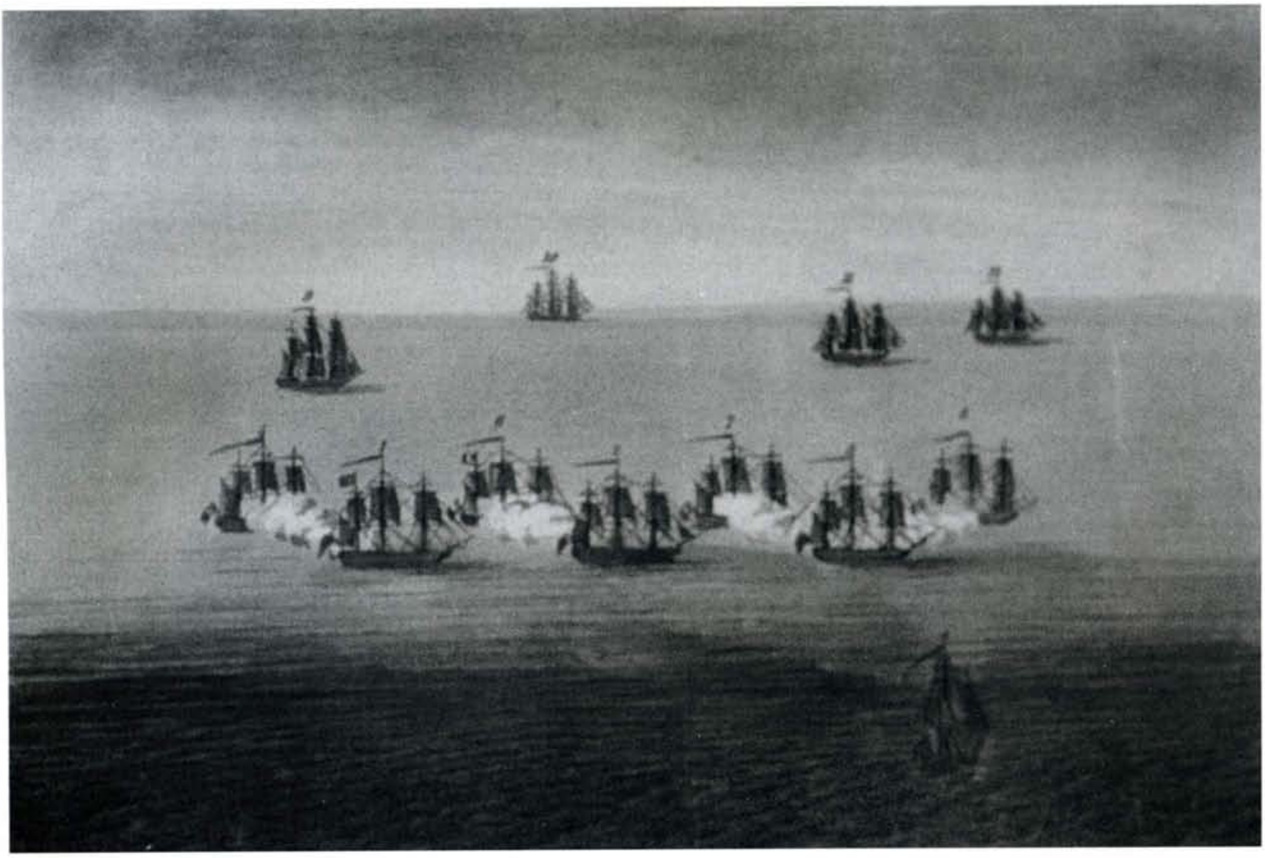
From mid-July through mid-October 1805, Commodore Allemand, with his formidable small squadron that included a 120-gun ship, four 74s, three frigates, and some sloops, had been attempting to rendezvous with Villeneuve in the Bay of Biscay, while, at the same time, evading battle and remaining a threat to British operations. The whereabouts of Allemand remained a continual uncertainty as General Sir David Baird's Expedition sailed from Ireland in mid-August to retake the Cape of Good Hope and, in early September, Nelson sailed from England to join Calder and Collingwood off Cadiz. (Reproduced from Julian S. Corbett, *The Campaign of Trafalgar*, Longmans, Green, and Co., London [1910], facing p. 302)

make his rendezvous with Villeneuve and the small squadron under Admiral Allemand. Napoleon grew increasingly irritated at the failure of his admirals to

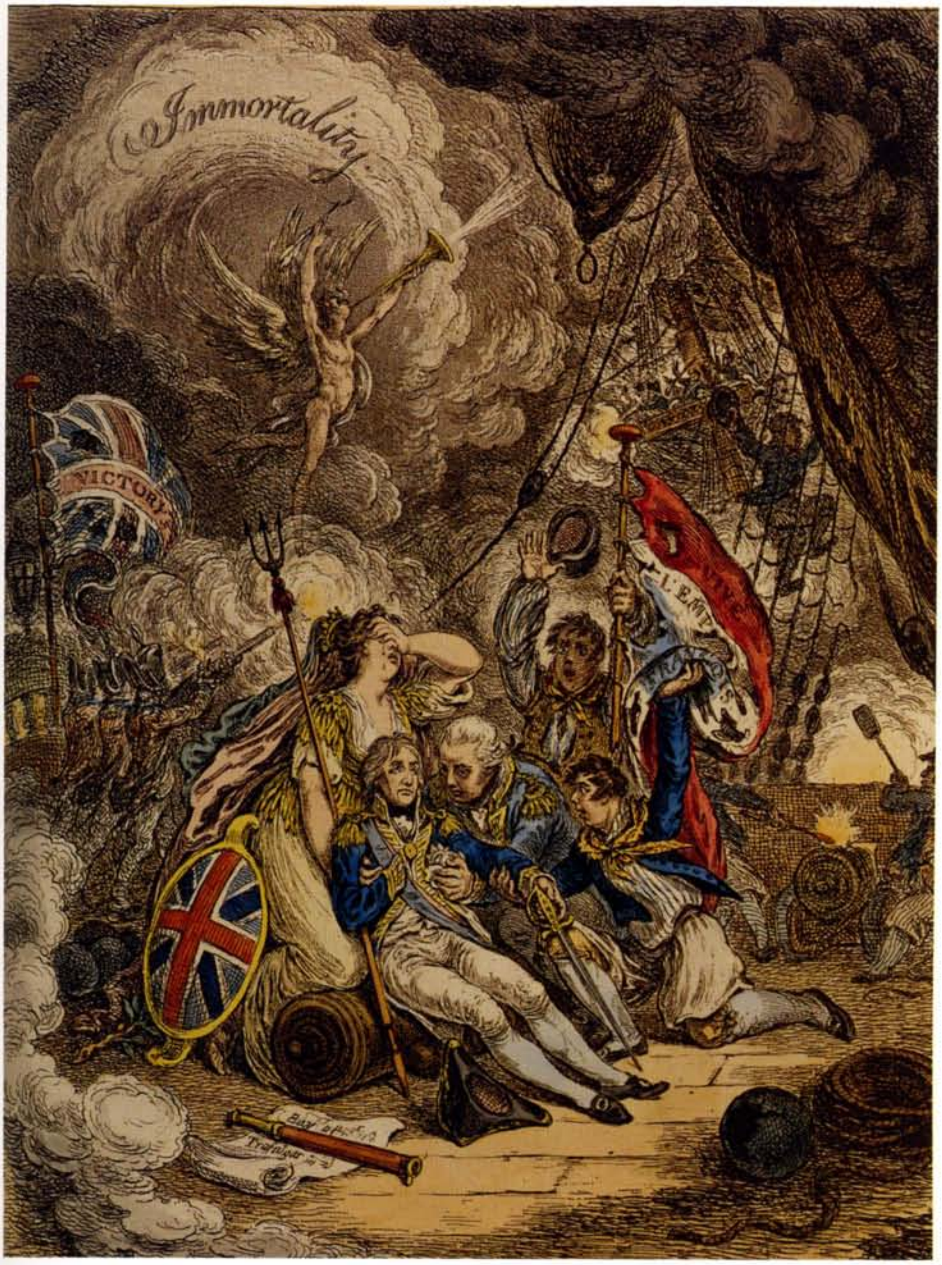


Sir Richd. Strachan's Action with the French off Rochefort: Novr. 2. 1805 in which four French ships were taken. Ferrol 4th Nov 1805 (London: Aquatint published by Laurie and Whittle, 12 Dec 1805). Following the battle of Trafalgar, a number of the French and Spanish ships dispersed at sea. A fortnight after the battle, Captain Sir Richard Strachan in the 80-gun HMS *Caesar* with three 74s and four frigates, encountered four French warships under Rear-Admiral Dumanoir le Pelley in the Bay of Biscay, off Cape Ortegal, north-western Spain. Although the French initially declined to fight as they were making for French ports, Strachan pursued them and forced them to surrender in a series of sharp actions. The captured French flagship *Duguay-Trouin*, was taken into the Royal Navy and later became the boy's training ship *Implacable*, moored at Devonport from 1858 to 1949. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)

carry out his plans. In particular, he became increasingly and violently critical of Villeneuve for his failure to gather the scattered French and Spanish forces under his command and to move northward to cover the proposed cross-channel attack.

Meanwhile, during August 1805, Napoleon saw clear indications of the growing coalition army in Austria and Italy and realized that he needed to move quickly if he were to prevent it from becoming a major threat. Despairing of the French navy's ability to support his strategic plan to invade England – if, indeed, he had really ever thought it practicable – Napoleon gave up the plan or the pretence and disbanded the camps for the planned invasion army of England. While doing this, with characteristic acidity Napoleon wrote in early September to Naval Minister Admiral Decrès, 'Villeneuve is a villain to be ignominiously discharged. Without tactical ability, without courage, without general interest, he would sacrifice everything to save his own skin... Nothing is comparable to his ineptness.'[31]

Moving the French Army rapidly eastward from the encampments facing Britain to join those in northwest Germany, Napoleon moved quickly into southern Germany and on to Bavaria, where in the first week of October, he surprised, surrounded, and defeated General Mack's Austrian Army at Ulm, long before the Russian corps could come to join it. Napoleon's dramatic victory

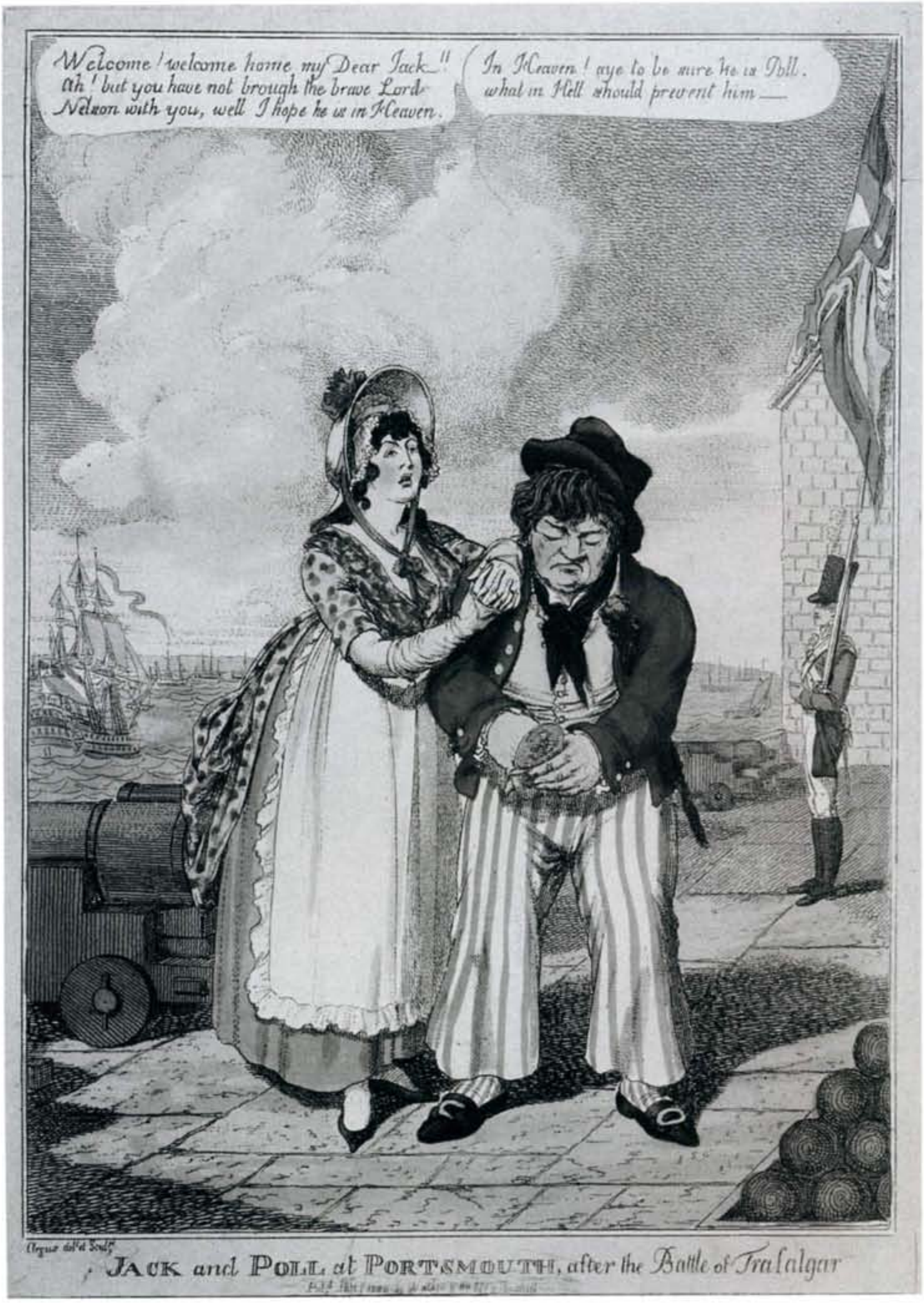


Immortality – the Death of Admiral Lord Nelson – in the moment of Victory! – this Design for the Memorial intended by the City of London…humbly submitted to the…Lord Mayor…. (London: Etching produced by James Gillray, artist and engraver, and H. Humphrey, publisher, 23 December 1805.) James Gillray published this caricature on the day that Nelson's body was transferred from HMS *Victory* and delivered to Greenwich by HMS *Chatham*. (Royal Naval Museum)

marked the end of the Third Coalition's hopes for military victory on the Continent, although the Archduke Carl had a brief, initial success.

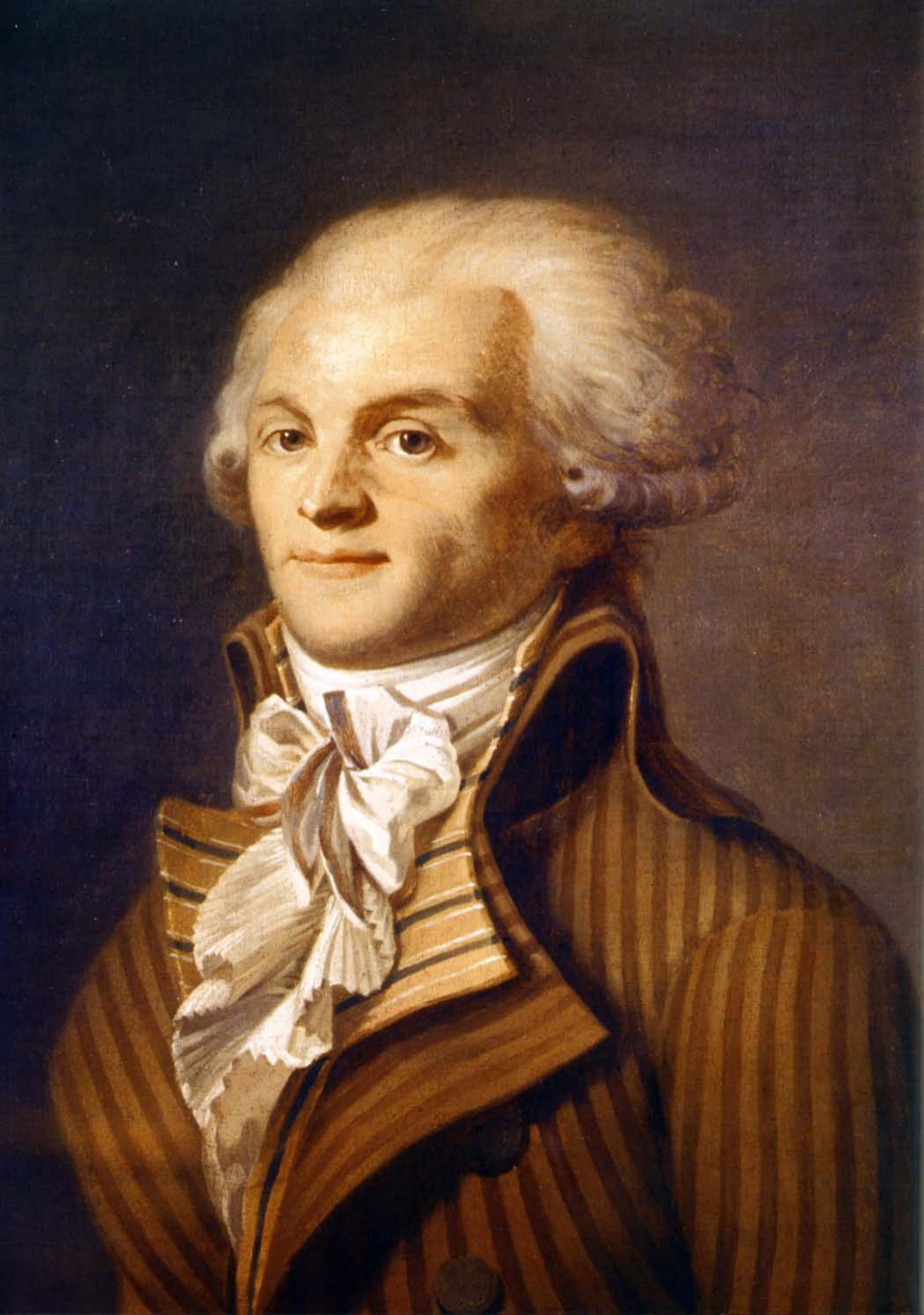
Occurring within days after battle of Ulm, the victory at Trafalgar clearly marked Britain's survival and made even the pretence of a French invasion an impotent threat. The main coalition partners were not so fortunate. By 13 November, Napoleon's cavalry entered Vienna while the main army pursued the retreating Austro-Russian Army into Moravia, where on 2 December 1805 the Coalition Army attacked Napoleon at Austerlitz and was decimated. The Third Coalition destroyed, at Pressburg on 29 December Austria agreed to peace, but it was one

Jack and Poll at Portsmouth after the Battle of Trafalgar. (London: Etching produced by Argus, artist & engraver, January 1806.) In contrast to the lavish formal and public spectacle of Nelson's funeral that was taking place in the first week of January 1806, this caricature emphasized the quiet remorse of the ordinary seaman. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)


Welcome! welcome home my Dear Jack!! Ah! but you have not brough the brave Lord Nelson with you, well I hope he is in Heaven.
In Heaven! aye to be sure he is Poll. what in Hell should prevent him —
Argus del et Sculp
JACK and POLL at PORTSMOUTH, after the Battle of Trafalgar

that cost her heavily in Italian and southern German territory, virtually removing Austrian influence from these regions. At the same time, Napoleon's success in southern Germany let him control those states further by gifts of enemy territory. Among them, Prussia received Hanover, but found she had to pay dearly for the gift. British military expeditions in association with the allies in Northern Germany and in Italy had come to nothing. The Anglo-Russian alliance was not dead, even though the larger military coalition involving Austria had been defeated.

Nevertheless, the experience of the War of the Third Coalition demonstrated that, while Russia and Britain could survive in their geo-strategic positions on the periphery of Europe, they alone could neither defeat Napoleon nor, as the co-heads of a coalition, control the political future of Europe. Napoleon's military successes lured him on to wider and more ambitious dreams of empire.



CHAPTER ONE

THE RIVALS

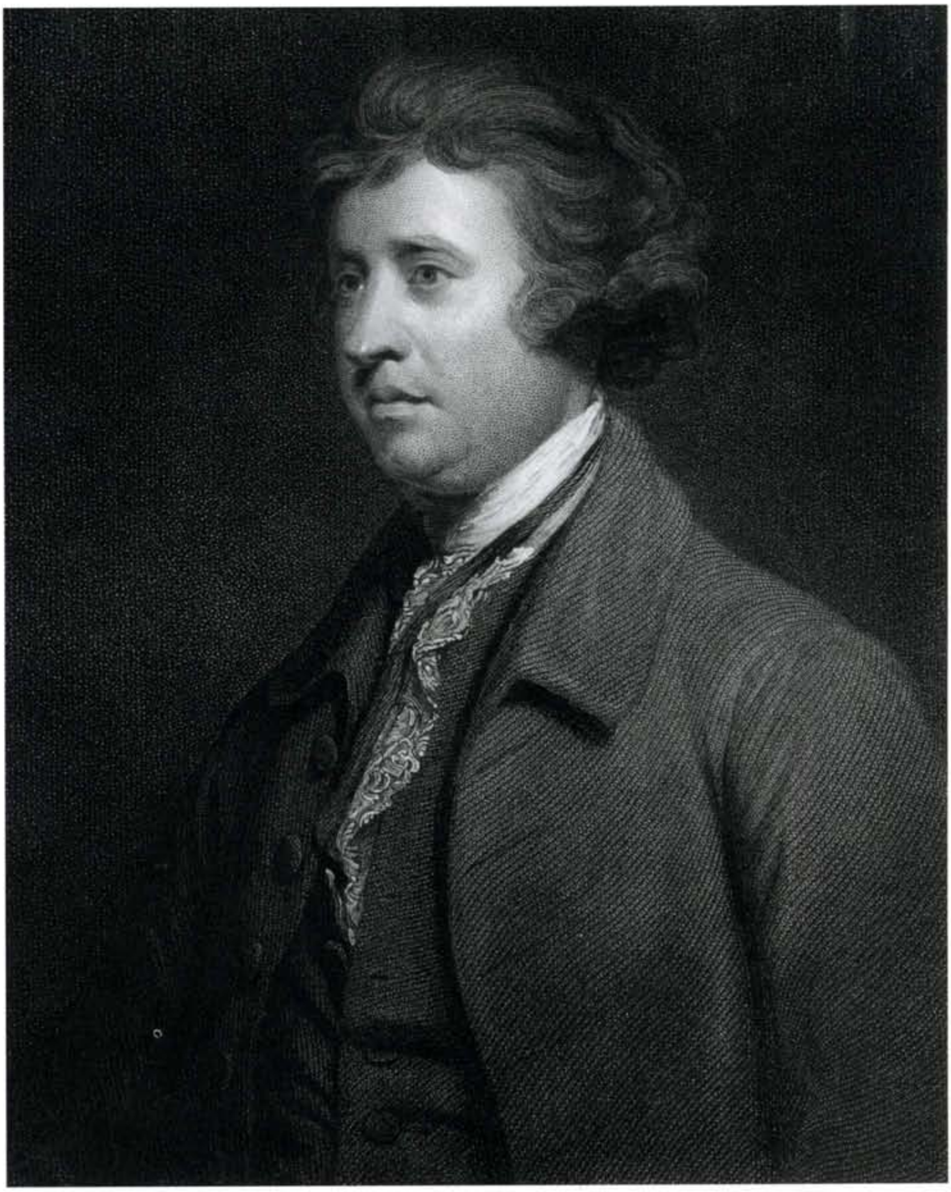
PETER PADFIELD

Britain and France had fought each other throughout the 18th century, with intervals of mutual exhaustion. The initial trigger had been the accession to the English throne of William of Orange in 1689 after what was dubbed the 'Glorious Revolution' against James II for his arbitrary rule and perceived Popish preferences. The aims of William's English backers were to curtail the Royal prerogative by subordinating it to Parliament in most important areas, and to safeguard the established Protestant Church. William's aim when he accepted the Crown was to contain the expansionist ambitions of the 'Sun King', Louis XIV of France, by binding England into a great anti-French alliance. This chimed with his parliamentary supporters who had been watching anxiously as Louis built up a great navy in addition to his first class army. They perceived France as now the major naval, colonial and commercial rival. The position was described succinctly in a House of Commons debate some years before William's accession: 'The interest of the King of England is to keep France from being too great on the Continent, and the French interest is to keep us from being masters of the sea.'[1]

This could serve as a useful summary of the situation in 1789 when France erupted in Revolution against Louis XVI. The subsequent Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars were the final desperate rounds in the struggle that had begun a hundred years before. This was not clear at the time. Nor was it clear that it was a struggle for world mastery, or that the victorious power would impose its own values and model of government on western Europe and large tracts of the globe over the following century – would, indeed, create the modern world.[2]

Historical speculation is deceptive; nonetheless it is useful to suggest, if only to stress the cosmic importance of the British–French struggle, that had France, not Britain, prevailed not only would French be the dominant world tongue today, but the government system of choice for rational men of goodwill would not be democracy, but top-down, centralized, rule-dominated bureaucracy – to which, it must be admitted, recent British governments and a sizeable proportion of the

OPPOSITE
Maximilien Robespierre (1758–94) was a leading member of the radical Jacobin Club and a disciple of Rousseau, whose major work, *The Social Contract*, he is said to have re-read every day. It is no accident that he was a chief architect of 'The Terror', to which he himself eventually fell victim. (Mary Evans Picture Library)



Edmund Burke (1729–97) penned the most lucid critique of the French Revolution in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). The book spelled out the differences between the authentic freedoms enjoyed in Burke's view by the English, founded on order and moderation and hallowed by custom versus those grasped violently by the French revolutionaries. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

electorate have subscribed, despite our very different tradition. Similarly, concepts of freedom and the law would be state-centred: ideas of common law, residual freedoms – as opposed to statutory 'rights' – and trial by jury would be confined to a probably smaller, less dominant United States of America. What can scarcely be in doubt is that our mental and political worlds would be very different.

France did not win. She went down to humiliating defeat. This should be cause for wonder: on any rational calculation she appeared to hold the best cards. Her population at the time of the Revolution was perhaps three times that of Great Britain, her national product perhaps double. Her land was larger, spread across more diverse climatic regions, served by navigable rivers and she faced three major trading axes, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the Channel route to England and the Baltic. She maintained the greatest army in Europe; her colonies in the West Indies were at least as profitable as Britain's; she enjoyed a brilliant religious, cultural and intellectual life; as Edmund Burke, chief spokesman and prophet for the opposition to the French Revolution in Britain and abroad, wrote at the time:

> When I consider the face of the kingdom of France; the multitude and opulence of her cities; the useful magnificence of her spacious high roads and bridges; the opportunity of her artificial canals and navigations opening the convenience of maritime communications through a solid continent of so immense an extent; when I turn my eyes to the tremendous works of her ports and harbours, and to her whole naval apparatus, whether for war or trade ... when I reflect on the excellence of her manufactures and fabrics, second to none but our own, and in some particulars not second; when I contemplate the grand foundations of charity, public and private...the state of all the arts that beautify and polish life ... her able statesmen, the multitude of her profound lawyers and theologians, her philosophers, her critics, her historians and antiquaries, her poets and her orators ... I behold in all this something which awes and commands the imagination...[3]

France was a great power with a rich civilization. However, the splendid edifice was to a degree hollow and her institutions thoroughly outdated. In her constitutional and social arrangements, her financial practices, her agriculture and industry she was up to a century behind Great Britain – assuming progress, for better or for worse, flowed towards the modern world. And although she often built better warships than the British, her navy was far inferior. Admiral the Comte de Grasse, defeated by Admiral Sir George Rodney at the Saints in 1781 and brought aboard the British flagship said, after admiring the discipline, cleanliness and gunnery arrangements aboard, that the French service was a hundred years behind.[4]

The reason France lagged in so many fields, and one of the prime causes of the Revolution of 1789, was the rigidity of the regime and the social order. In common with other continental empires – unlike the major maritime powers, Great Britain and the Dutch Republic – the French people had traded in their ancient consultative forums for internal stability under a strong central government in which they had no say. The modern situation had begun in the seventeenth century when Louis XIV, after a miserable childhood in which he had seen his country torn apart by fractious nobles, had concentrated all power in his own hands, at the same time blunting the potency of the nobles by raising a new 'nobility of the robe' from the wealthy merchant class to be his ministers and administrators. Since these enjoyed the same considerable exemptions from taxes and the other prerogatives of the traditional 'nobility of the sword', this swelled the vested interest in preserving privilege. It was further swelled as Louis and his successors, needing vast sums to pay for wars, sold higher judicial and government offices which carried grants of nobility.

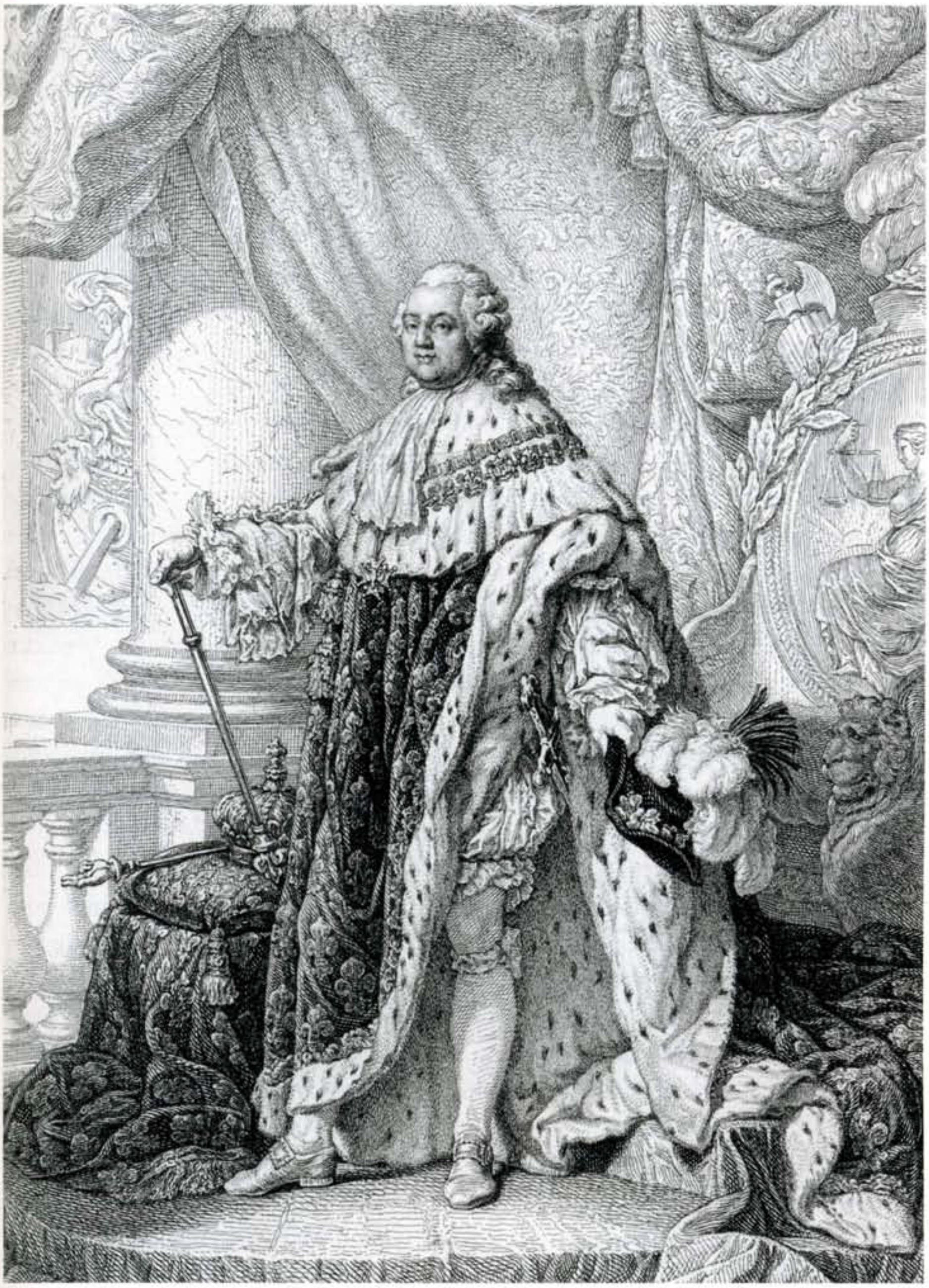
The Catholic Church and Church lands also enjoyed tax immunities, and the different regions of the country absorbed over centuries by conquest or dynastic inheritance preserved certain tax privileges. So, while in theory Louis' Bourbon successors ruled by divine right as absolute monarchs, they were in many respects as constrained by class, Church and provincial privilege, even public opinion and custom, as William's successors in Britain by Parliament and Statute, nowhere more than in the crucial area of tax. Paradoxically, while French taxes were still collected in traditional, often arbitrary ways by private consortia known as tax farmers, Britain had developed a centralized system of collection by permanent salaried officials which was far more efficient and above all transparent and manifestly fairer.

French finance ministers made repeated attempts over the years to reform the tax structure in order to tap more of the wealth of the nation, but they had been blocked by the privileged orders, in particular the hereditary nobles who sat as magistrates in the Paris and provincial parlements, the high courts of justice which retained as a vestige of their original function as a king's consultative council the right to register Royal decrees into law or to withhold registration and issue a 'remonstrance'. These provided the only constitutional checks on the king's power, although they could be overruled if the king appeared before the parlement in person.

The magistrates' arguments linked inequalities in the three 'Orders' of society, clergy, nobles and commoners, with divine law which had endowed men with unequal characteristics; they claimed that attempts to create an equality of duties between the classes would destroy the distinctions necessary to a harmonious society and provoke disorder. The different duties were spelled out by the Paris parlement in 1776 when Louis XVI's first Controller General of Finances proposed abolishing existing taxes and substituting a single tax on land, including noble and Church estates:

> The personal responsibility of the clergy is to fulfil all the functions relating to education and religion and to aid the unfortunate through alms. The noble devotes his life to the defence of the state and assists the sovereign by providing council. The last class of the nation [the Third Estate], which cannot render such distinguished service to the state, fulfils its obligations through taxes, industry and physical labour.[5]

This argument for duties and rights hallowed by time might have been penned by Edmund Burke; it was central to his philosophy. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Burke wrote, 'By a constitutional policy, working after the pattern of nature, we receive, we hold, we transmit our government and



Louis XVI (1755–93), King of France 1774–92. Although he was in principle in favour of reform, he lacked the strength of personality to engage successfully, let alone lead, France out of the political, financial and social morass and growing discontent that was eventually to spark the revolution. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

our privileges in the same manner in which we enjoy and transmit our property and our lives.'[6] But Burke never supposed tradition precluded change. He was a committed reformer, in the same work describing his ideal statesman as one with 'a disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve',[7] and asserting that 'A state without the means of change is without the means of its own conservation'.[8] Here was the nub of the French dilemma: the only independent organs of state, the parlements, lacking any elements representative of the bulk of the population, blocked all change that threatened noble or ecclesiastical privilege;

and viewing every national institution as a necessary link in the grand chain of state, shrank from loosening or abolishing any one. When Louis XVI's Controller General proposed abolishing the merchant and craft guilds which regulated production, quality, prices and wages in the commercial and industrial sectors, the Paris parlement remonstrated:

> Sire, because independence is a defect in the political constitution and men are always tempted to abuse liberty, the law has instituted corporations, created guilds, and established regulations. The law has wished to prevent frauds of all kinds and remedy all abuses ... to abolish the regulations ... is to destroy all the various means which commerce itself must want for its own preservation.[9]

Parlement, supported by the dominant noble interest at court, triumphed. Louis sacked his Controller General; the tax and guild reforms fell.

Nine years later in 1785 – four years before the Revolution – two young French noblemen, François and Alexandre de la Rochefoucauld, toured England on an informal spying expedition; there were any number of official French spies in the country attempting to probe the secrets of Britain's astonishing industrial and agricultural advances. At Sheffield the two were shown around a factory producing steel implements. François described the machine processes in detail in his journal, afterwards adding a general comment on English commerce and industry:

> there are no regulations at all, no restraints to hold them up; a merchant does well or badly as he pleases; these are his affairs and the buyer's, who is not taken in. There is nothing in England resembling all the commercial laws of France.[10]

Earlier, the brothers had been shown around a copper-button making factory. François noted that the greater part of the output went abroad: 'most goes to France. It is extraordinary that we [French] don't succeed in an art so simple.'[11]

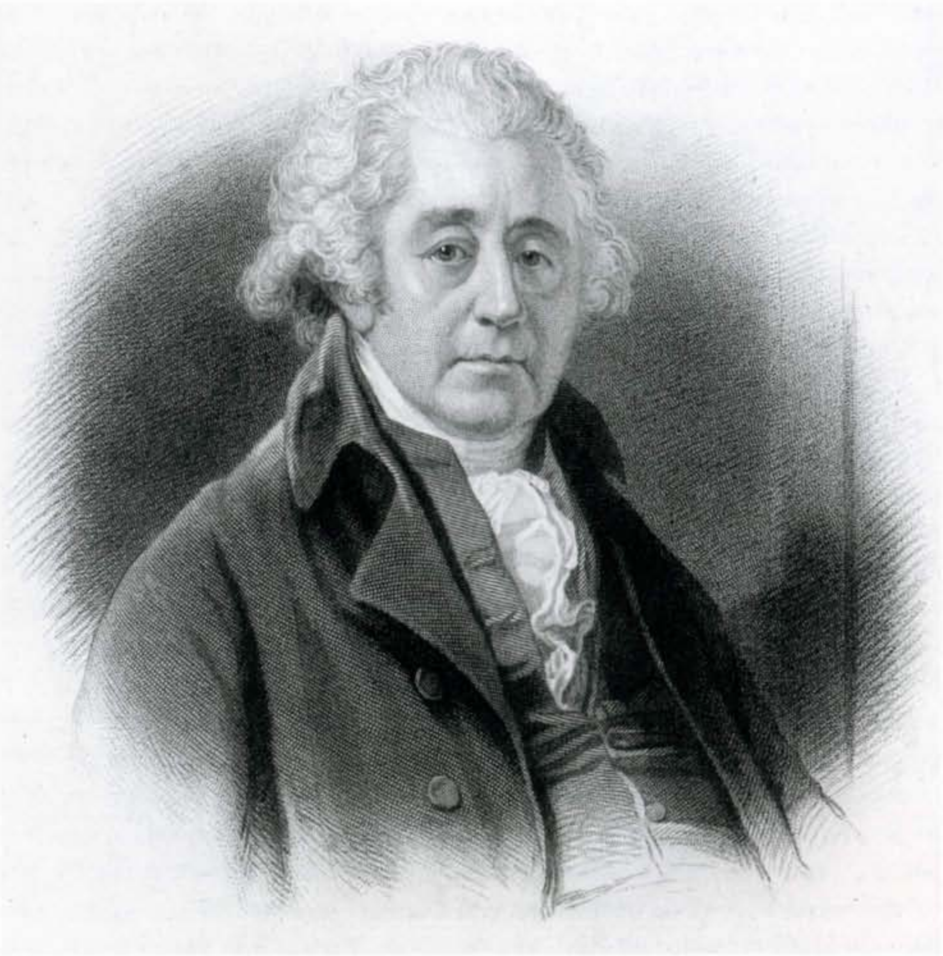
Given the guild restrictions on enterprise, it was not so extraordinary; in addition the internal market in France was subject to tariff barriers between regions, another commercial handicap that successive finance ministers had been unable to break down. Of even greater significance was a national ethos derived from feudal chivalry. When remonstrating against the proposed single tax on land the Paris parlement had reminded Louis of 'the descendants of those ancient knights...who for so many centuries shed their blood for the extension and defence of the monarchy.'[12] In truth, by this date, while the nobility of the sword still provided the officers of both army and navy, the majority of noble families had commoner ancestors elevated, usually by purchase, within the past century.[13] This did not affect perceptions. The mental world inhabited by the nobility was constructed from national glory and personal honour and had a bias against trade. Nobles were not debarred from more 'respectable' enterprises such as overseas commerce or from membership of the more prestigious Paris guilds, and several did engage seriously in industrial enterprise, but in general the flow was in the opposite direction: successful merchants, craving nobility, spent fortunes purchasing government posts, thus tending to deprive the commercial sector of investment and effective leaders, and at the same time adding more tiers of officialdom to enforce the regulations which restricted Frenchmen in every economic activity.

The infiltration of the aristocracy by the wealthy bourgeoisie has been used to suggest that France and Great Britain were not dissimilar in terms of social mobility. Yet there was a vast difference. The elevated French man of business not only assumed the code, exclusivity and often it seems the hauteur of the order he had entered, but gained a different legal identity. That acute social analyst, Alexis de Tocqueville, summed up the difference with the words 'gentleman', in England applying to every well-educated man whatever his birth, and 'gentilhomme', applying only to a noble in France: 'The meaning of these two words of common origin has been so transformed by the different social climates of the two countries that today they simply cannot be translated.'[14]

In Britain the landed aristocracy had long been partners in or promoters of merchant enterprise. It was probably the result of Britain's island situation, the consequent commitment to oceanic discovery and trade. France produced great seamen explorers and traders, but for geographical reasons the focus of the French state had always been on the extension or defence of the land borders and internal harmonization of the different regions. Thus, while French nobles were in general dedicated to their estates, martial glory or government service, or fashion and amusement, disdaining trade, the British aristocracy was permeated by the habits and values of commercial exchange: in Britain alone of European nations, apart from the Dutch Republic, trade was accounted an honourable occupation fit for gentlemen.[15]

The commercial ethos had tended to break down received ideas and class barriers. With money a man could buy a landed estate and the social status that went with it. He might be resented by those of ancient lineage but would not, as in France, acquire a different legal status and an official post. It was the desire for self-improvement through trade, industry or agriculture unencumbered by government or guild regulations – since English craft guilds had fallen into decay – that had encouraged experiment and invention in every field. The la Rochefoucauld brothers were as astonished by the proportions of the cattle and sheep designed by selective breeding on Mr Bakewell's famous estate in Leicestershire as by the complexity and precision of the machines in the cotton mills of Derby or the unique bridge constructed entirely of iron over the Severn at Coalbrookdale in Shropshire; and they were awed by the number of steam engines they saw in use draining mines, lifting coal, pumping water, working the bellows of blast furnaces. 'We admired them [steam engines] as things simply unknown in our country',[16] François wrote.

The impression given by the journals of these inquiring and intelligent young Frenchmen is not only that Britain was technologically far ahead of France



Matthew Boulton (1728–1809) was a manufacturer of metal goods who saw the potential of steam engines for powering factory production lines and, in partnership with the inventor James Watt, produced the engines which revolutionized British industry. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

before the Revolution, but was well on the way to the economic transformation known as the Industrial Revolution: everything was in place, commercial agriculture, coal mines, ironworks, canals, water-powered textile mills, factory production lines, steam engines, engineers, inventors, driven entrepreneurs, local finance and, on the part of those managing the enterprises, confident assurance.

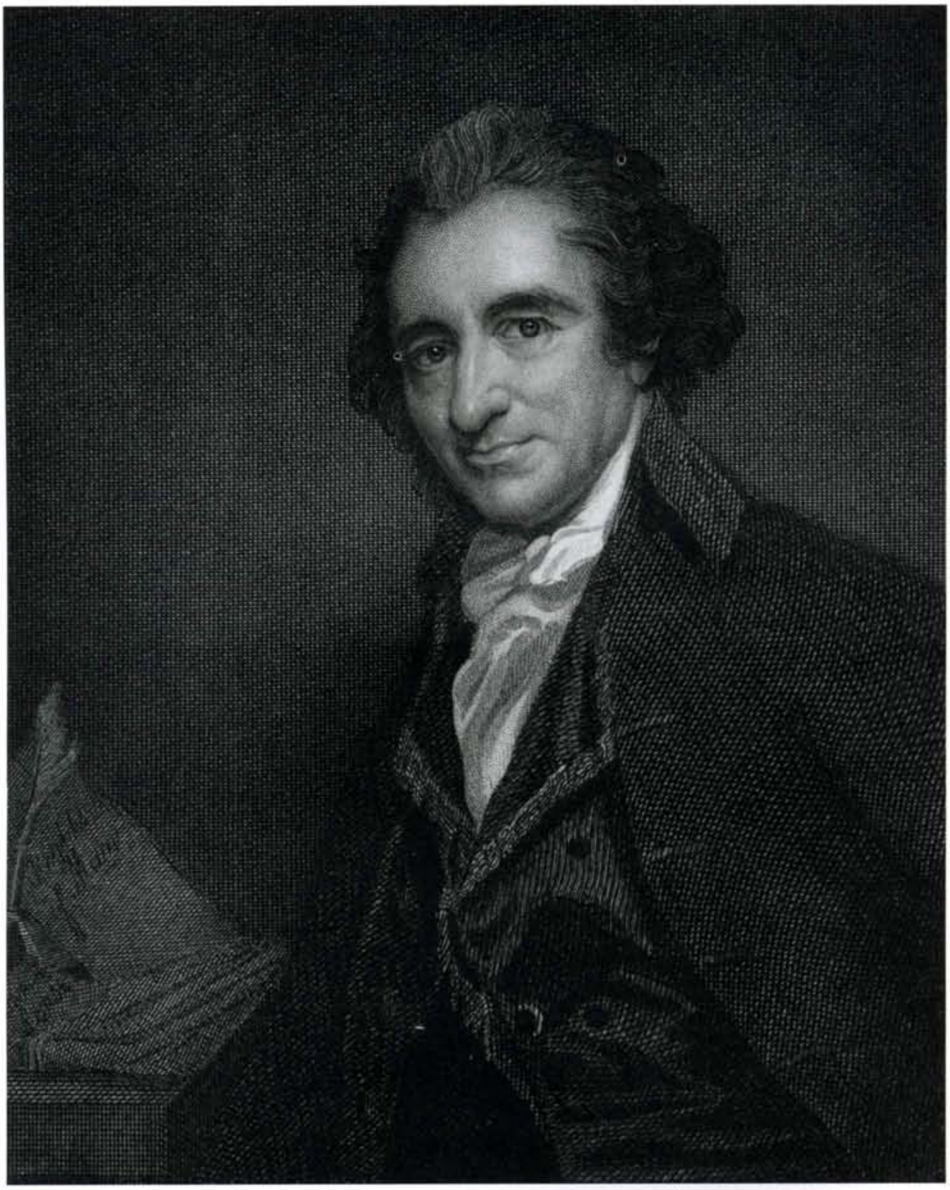
Apart from commercial character, the quality that most distinguished Britain from France was individual freedom. None were more aware of this than French intellectuals who were constrained by Royal or Church censorship in everything they wrote. Voltaire, forced into exile in England earlier in the century, had described his surprise at finding himself in a country where men were free to say or publish what they liked, there was no torture or arbitrary imprisonment, all religious beliefs were permitted and nobles and priests paid taxes like everyone else.[17] And Montesquieu described England as the freest country in the world: 'I call it free because the sovereign, whose person is controlled and limited, is unable to inflict any imaginable harm on anyone.'[18]

Integral to freedom of expression was the individual's freedom in law. The principle dated back at least to King John's Magna Carta of 1215, article 39 of which stated: 'No free man shall be arrested or imprisoned...or in any way victimized, neither will we attack him or send anyone to attack him, except by the lawful judgement of his peers or the law of the land.'[19] This was the basis of trial by jury. It was complemented by the common-law writ of habeas corpus, whose origins seem to have pre-dated Magna Carta, requiring a person held in custody to be produced before a court for judicial enquiry into the legality of his detention. These fundamental protections of individual liberty against arbitrary power stood at the opposite pole to the French system, where the king was the law and any of his subjects could be imprisoned indefinitely simply on the authority of a Royal warrant.

Voltaire and Montesquieu both observed that British freedoms were founded on common law, that is a body of individual court judgements arrived at by custom and precedent down the centuries rather more than from Royal decrees or statutes enacted by legislation; the English, Voltaire wrote, loved their laws 'because they are, or at least think themselves, the framers of them'.[20] Both also noted that ultimately freedom was preserved by the restraints placed on the king by Parliament. The principle of separating the powers of the executive – the king – and the legislature – Parliament – as a means of balancing one against the other and preventing either from arbitrary or tyrannical government had been propounded by the English philosopher, John Locke, in 1689 as William of Orange ascended the throne and, unlike his predecessors, showed no disposition to overstep the strict limits placed on his authority. From 1700 the judiciary also became separate in practice since judges could no longer be dismissed on purely political grounds.

Montesquieu worked up his observations of British constitutional practice into a volume, in English translation, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1750), which held the separation of the executive, legislature and judiciary as fundamental to liberty. The book became the cornerstone of political theory – not practice – in Europe, and after the revolt of Britain's north American colonies the principle of the separation of powers was enshrined in the constitution of the United States, ratified in 1788. The following year, as the French Revolution broke out, Congress passed ten amendments which gave US citizens practical rights the British had acquired down the centuries: freedom of religion, speech and the press; rights of peacable assembly; security against unreasonable searches; trial by jury; and the right not to be a witness against oneself or to be oppressed by excessive fines or 'cruel and unusual punishments'.

Another aspect of British freedom as first defined by Locke – also incorporated in the United States constitution – was the accountability of the government to the governed: should those in power neglect or miscarry in their duties, authority reverted to society, 'and the People have a Right to act as Supreme, and continue the Legislative in themselves, or place it in a new form, or new hands'.[21] This was not mere theory. Both the British and Americans had a fierce pride in their right and obligation to participate in local, even national affairs. This, again, was at the opposite pole to French society where decrees and



Thomas Paine (1737–1809) emigrated from England to Philadelphia in 1774, where he campaigned for independence from Britain. His *Rights of Man* (1791), a counterpoint to Burke's *Reflections* …, supported the French Revolution and attacked the institution of monarchy. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

regulations handed down from Paris via the regional Intendant (governor) were administered by local state functionaries, depriving the populace of any degree of political initiative. In Britain central government was not involved in local matters. Lords Lieutenant, Sheriffs and Justices of the Peace in the counties and boroughs were notionally responsible to the Crown, but in practice administered their domains independently.

In their determination to keep central authority out of their lives the British, alone of European nations, had no disciplined bodies of police, and maintained the army at home in peacetime at the minimum strength necessary to quell civil disorder. No doubt in compensation for inadequate policing, punishments were savage. The death penalty was prescribed for over 150 crimes, including petty larceny and stealing sheep; and there were more executions in London than in Paris. These provided public spectacles catering to instincts otherwise indulged by bear-baiting, cock-fighting and similar degrading entertainments.

Nor were the British as a nation – with numerous honourable exceptions – more sensitive to the sufferings inflicted on negroes transported from Africa to the Caribbean and America to work as slaves in the growth industries of the day, sugar, cotton and tobacco. Liberal writers in Britain and France denounced the hideous traffic, but it still increased. Britain led in numbers of slaves transported, but France shipped substantial numbers in equally abominable conditions, and French West Indian planters were as capable of extreme cruelty to those they owned as personal property as their British counterparts. Nonetheless, consciences had been awakened and Britain's shame was about to provoke what must be accounted the most glorious episode in British Parliamentary history.

A campaign against the slave trade started by Quakers and other non-conformist Churches had won popular support throughout Britain and led to the establishment in London of a Committee for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade – soon echoed in Paris by a Société des Amis des Noirs – and in May 1789, inaugural month of what was to become the French Revolution, a Member of Parliament, William Wilberforce, and the Prime Minister, William Pitt, supported by Edmund Burke and others, took the abolitionist cause to the House of Commons. Defeated initially by powerful West Indian and shipping interests, they persevered year after year and, aided by public agitation, won the argument: legislation outlawing the slave trade was passed by both Houses of Parliament in 1807; by coincidence, in the same month a similar law was passed in the United States Congress. They were victories for the first purely philanthropic public campaigns in history and triumphs of free speech and consultative government since they were moral decisions carried against huge commercial pressures and the countries' own self-interest, in Britain's case at the height of a life and death struggle against Napoleon. By contrast, one of Napoleon's first acts on taking power as military dictator was to reverse a decree passed earlier by the French Revolutionary Assembly for freeing slaves; and he restored government backing for the slave trade.

In practical terms the field in which British Parliamentary government under a constitutional monarch proved decisively superior to the absolutism of the Bourbons and successive Revolutionary and Napoleonic administrations was finance, in particular the ability to borrow money cheaply. Parliament's control of the national purse meant that loans taken out were guaranteed as a 'national debt', not the king's personal obligations. And the careful scrutiny of the public accounts in Parliament, the openness of the proceedings, together with the equally transparent tax system and a policy of funding loans with returns from specific taxes or duties, had given investors at home and abroad such confidence in the probity of the system that British governments were able to spread the huge costs of war far into the future with long-term borrowing at rates of interest scarcely above peacetime rates.

This was not an option available to absolute monarchical governments, whose borrowings were tied to the reputation of the king. In Bourbon France there was no public scrutiny of taxes raised or sums spent or borrowed in the national interest, nor even a ministerial audit. In war the resulting financial chaos was too often met by reneging on or renegotiating loans or inflating the currency by printing paper money; and the longer a war lasted, the more desperate the financial situation and the higher the rates of interest demanded by lenders. Moreover, the other expedients adopted to raise money with new or increased taxes and duties, forced levies and the sale of public offices had the effect of restraining economic activity and diverting investment. At some point in every war with Britain France was forced to make deep cuts in naval expenditure.

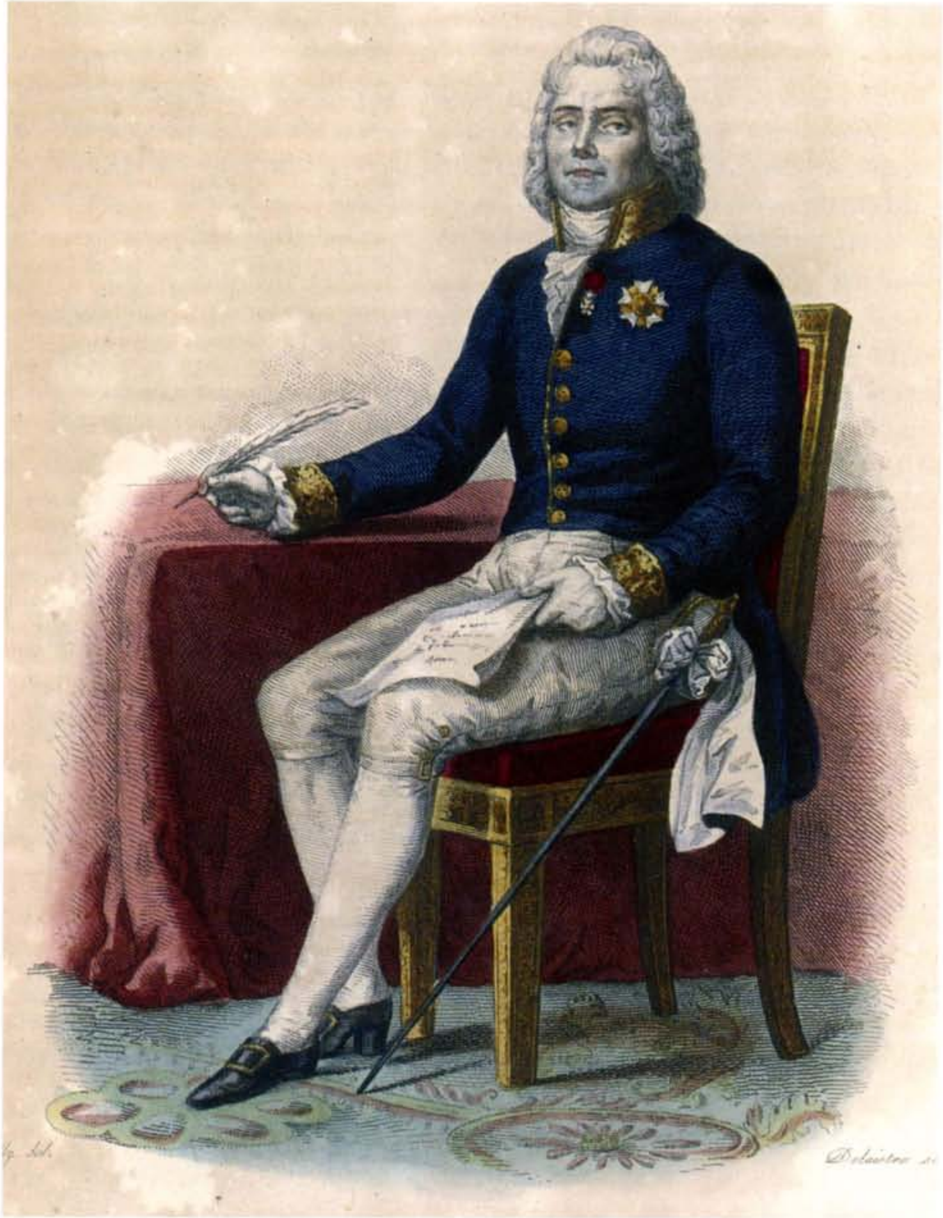
During negotiations to end the most recent War of American Independence, Louis XVI's foreign minister had implored France's ally, Spain, to endorse peace terms:

> The English have to some degree regenerated their navy while ours has been used up... Join to that the diminution of our financial means... That inconvenience is common, no doubt, also to England, but her constitution gives her in that regard advantages which our monarchical forms do not give us.[22]

When peace was signed after the American War, Britain's national debt had risen to three times its level at mid-century, yet she had been able to borrow throughout the war at peacetime rates of about three per cent, and was well able to service the debt. France had borrowed at up to ten per cent; her finances were again in chaos and it was more than ever clear to more intelligent observers that her whole constitution and social structure must undergo radical change.

The trigger for Revolution was national bankruptcy. Notwithstanding the accumulated debt from the American War, Louis XVI's government was preparing, as was customary, for the next war; the navy minister had embarked on construction of a fleet of 80 of the line, the largest in French history – far too large to man with available sailors – and a fantastical project to create an artificial harbour off Cherbourg, since France had no fleet base in the English Channel. It was a reaction to the threat posed to French trade and colonies by the dominant British navy and rapacious British merchants, but no doubt equally a positive drive to project French power and glory overseas. The programmes made a major contribution to economic disaster: with her incoherent fiscal and financial systems, France could not support both a first class army and a navy of a strength to challenge the British navy.

By 1888 accumulated debt in France had almost reached the size of the British national debt, but carrying higher interest, it cost twice as much to service; interest payments amounted to over half annual government expenditure and it had just been discovered that expenditure exceeded revenue by 130 million *livres* annually – about 20 per cent of the total budget. In addition, a substantial parcel of short-term debt was coming due for repayment.[23] The financial crisis was



Charles Maurice de Talleyrand (1754–1838) had been destined for the Catholic Church since a foot injury precluded his entry into the army. His ability to change colours to suit the moment was demonstrated when he sided with the revolutionaries to divest the Church of its lands. He was later excommunicated by the Pope. After a spell in the United States and England, where he became an admirer of parliamentary government, Talleyrand hitched his fortunes to Napoleon and he survived to engineer France's comparative success at the Congress of Vienna (1814–15). (Mary Evans Picture Library)

aggravated by escalating bread prices caused by a succession of poor harvests, an industrial depression and a deficit on the balance of trade with the outside world. The naval construction programme was sucking in raw materials from abroad, but the principal cause of the deficit was a trade treaty with Britain signed in 1786. William Pitt, a disciple of Adam Smith, was attempting to boost international commerce by freeing it from restrictions. Louis' ministers had agreed mutual reductions on import tariffs – most rashly since a large number of French manufacturers simply could not compete with the high-quality, low-cost products of Britain's nascent industrial revolution, and British goods flooded into the country with no reciprocal increase in the other direction.

After another vain attempt at tax reform, Louis bowed to popular pressure and convened an ancient representative forum which had long fallen into disuse, the Estates General. The deputies, elected from the three orders of society, assembled in their three orders at Versailles in May 1789 and immediately became locked in procedural dispute. In June the commoners of the Third Estate, claiming to represent 98 per cent of the nation, cut through argument by declaring themselves a 'National Assembly' with the right to consent to taxation. Louis shut them out of their meeting hall, whereupon they famously adjourned to a nearby Real Tennis court and vowed never to part until they had formed a new and just constitution. They were joined by many liberal representatives of the other two orders.

The Revolution thus begun had many currents. At one intellectual level it was concerned with the rationalist ideals of the 'Enlightenment', a new start for France and all mankind, written on a blank sheet from which all class distinction, stale custom and religious 'superstition' had been erased. Practical men of affairs, on the other hand, anticipated a French version of the 'Glorious Revolution', resulting in a constitutional monarchy, two-chamber legislature and separate judiciary after the British or American model; their aim was nationalistic: to enhance French power in financial, trading and industrial terms. Both groups had adherents among the nobles and clergy who had been infected over decades by Enlightenment ideas promulgated in salon discussion, banned books and circulated manuscripts, more recently with satirical and pornographic libels, chiefly against the Queen, Marie Antoinette. Beneath the outward show, the monarchy, nobility and particularly the Church had been fatally undermined.

At a more elemental level another Revolution had begun months earlier, born of hunger and unemployment among peasants, labourers and artisans, and manifest in rioting, looting and bloodshed in the cities, defiance of the game laws, attacks on grain transports and banditry in the countryside. Areas in the south were ungovernable. Everywhere, despair at high food prices found expression in rage against the system and the wealthy, supposed to be profiting at the expense of the poor. In April rioters in Paris had chanted 'Death to the rich! Death to aristocrats!' In July rampaging crowds overran customs posts and grain stores in the capital and stormed the Bastille prison, symbol of Royal power, cutting down the defenders and anyone suspected of being in the 'conspiracy' of wealth and privilege, parading their heads on pikes. Next day delegates from the different sections of the city formed an insurrectionary city government or 'commune' and adopted a blue and red (Parisian) and white (Bourbon) cockade as their symbol. *The Times* of London reported at the end of the month, 'There is neither law nor police at this moment in Paris. Our sovereign Lord the Mob govern the city at their pleasure.'[24]

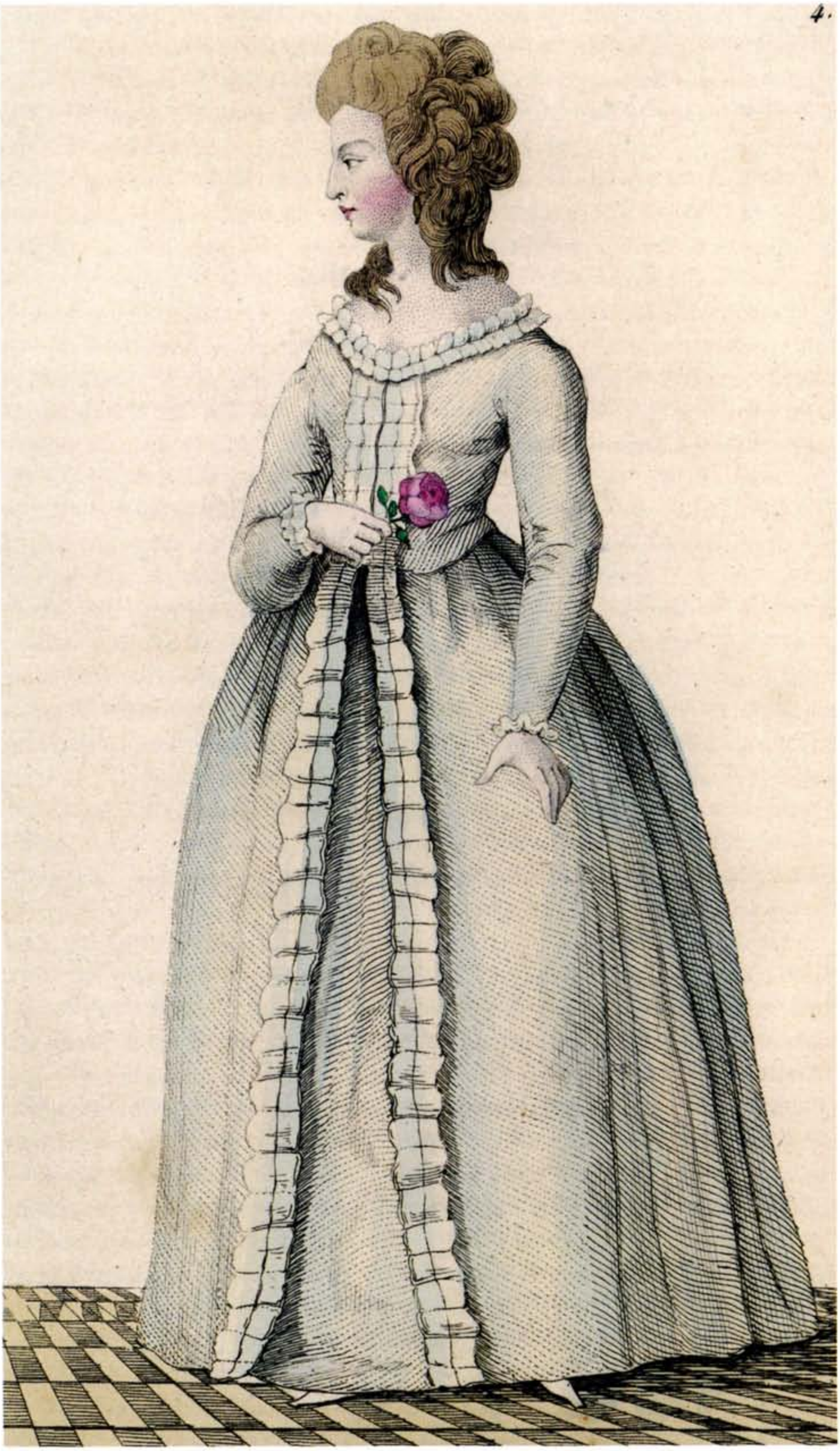
The Paris commune and rioters throughout the country provided the dynamic of the Revolution. To stave off anarchy the National, renamed Constituent Assembly since it was to produce a new constitution, pulled down the differentiated orders of society at a stroke with a 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen', asserting that 'Men are born free and equal in rights', defining the rights as 'Liberty, Property, Safety and Resistance to Oppression'[25] – an indication of the anxiety felt by the entirely middle-class representatives of the Third Estate, as well as the nobles and clergy, for the safety of their property. In contrast to the practical prescriptions of the Bill of Rights accepted by William of Orange in 1689 or the recent constitution of the United States, the Declaration was rhetorical; yet the Assembly did take rapid, practical steps to address the people's grievances, reforming the tax structure, sweeping away internal customs dues and feudal rights and provincial administrative anomalies, achieving in a short space what Bourbon ministers had attempted without success for a century. And in a breathtaking resolution born of financial necessity they transferred all Church property to the state for use as security for new loans. They changed France for ever. Yet in administration and the constitution they produced the deputies showed themselves true heirs of the absolutist regime they had replaced.

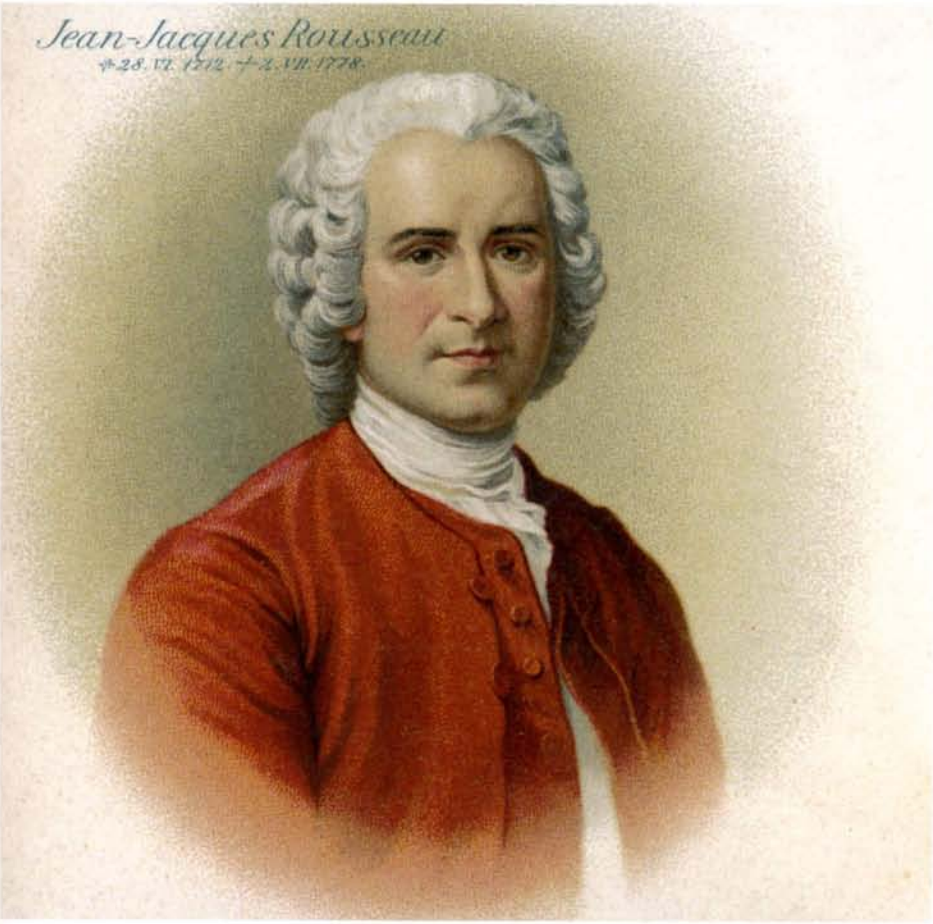
One reason was the preponderance of lawyers among the delegates of the Third Estate and the number of these who held government office, 278 out of 648 deputies, or 43 per cent.[26] These men, who played a critical role in framing the constitution, had been raised within the centralized bureaucratic tradition; their concern was to smooth and rationalize administration, not to introduce checks and balances after the Anglo-American model. There was also a large measure of utopianism among the deputies. One form derived from the influential 'physiocrat' school of political philosophy; envisaging a transformation of government and society according to reason and natural law, as they defined it, physiocrats knew it would require absolute authority to force through the radical changes they desired. Openly contemptuous of the British system, they assumed abuse of power could be prevented by continuous public instruction in the essence of justice and the natural order – which de Tocqueville later described as 'trifling gibberish'.[27]

Undoubtedly the pervading influence on the Assembly was Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Du contrat social* – The Social Contract – published in 1762. Rousseau initiated the shift away from Enlightenment reason towards the irrational, spontaneous, emotional and aesthetic areas of the mind termed the 'Romantic movement'; and his crucial contribution to Revolutionary theory lay in that zone. He proposed that individuals joining together in a 'Social Contract' to choose their own form of government and laws would be free since they shared sovereign authority in the constitution; at the same time they would be bound by their own free wills to obey the 'general will', famously concluding that individuals 'will be forced to be free'.[28] Belief in this paradox was another example of what de Tocqueville characterized as 'a kind of abstract and literary politics'[29] indulged by the French intelligentsia, since they had been excluded by the omnipresent state from real politics. It was also a rationalization for totalitarian government.

As such, it served the Revolutionaries. The new constitution presented to Louis XVI in 1791 reduced him to little more than a figurehead with certain

Marie Antoinette (1755–93), Louis XVI's Queen Consort, was widely rejected by the French people for her Austrian birth, extravagant and frivolous tastes and alleged sexual perversions as described in countless pornographic pamphlets which contributed to the downfall of the monarchy; she had little hope of mercy from the moral zealots of the Revolution. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

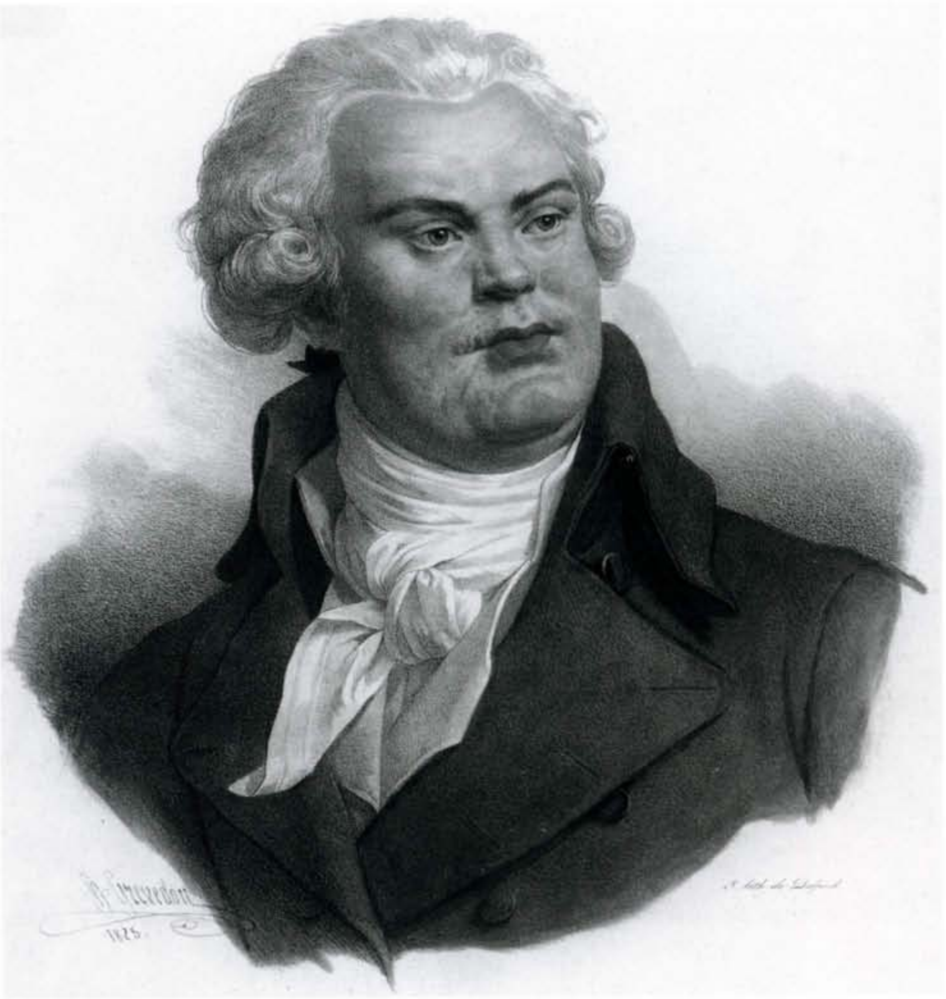




Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) was the single most important influence on the course of the French Revolution; his theory of the 'general will', whereby an individual in society would 'be forced to be free', might be said to have laid the theoretical basis for 'the Terror'. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

powers to delay legislation. Real authority was reserved to an elected single-chamber Legislative Assembly, the repository of the 'general will' of the people – although the poorest were excluded from the vote. Already, the previous summer, two executive committees had been established, one to secure government control of political appointments in the regions, another to supervise state security with powers of search, arrest and imprisonment without trial as arbitrary as those of the Bourbon apparatus. This was in response to counter-revolutionary threats from nobles and priests and widespread unrest due to rising food prices. To save the Revolution, the old organs of control and repression had to be resurrected.

It was insufficient. The bonds of society had been severed, anarchy loosed. To unify the nation behind the Revolution the new government was impelled to find a foreign enemy. The emperor of Austria made a fitting target: he was supporting émigré noble factions on the French border and, together with the king of Prussia, had publicly denounced the Revolutionaries' rhetoric of equality and self determination for all peoples. In April 1792 the Revolutionary government declared war. The king of Prussia made common cause with the emperor to extirpate the Revolution, and the French army was forced into retreat. The army

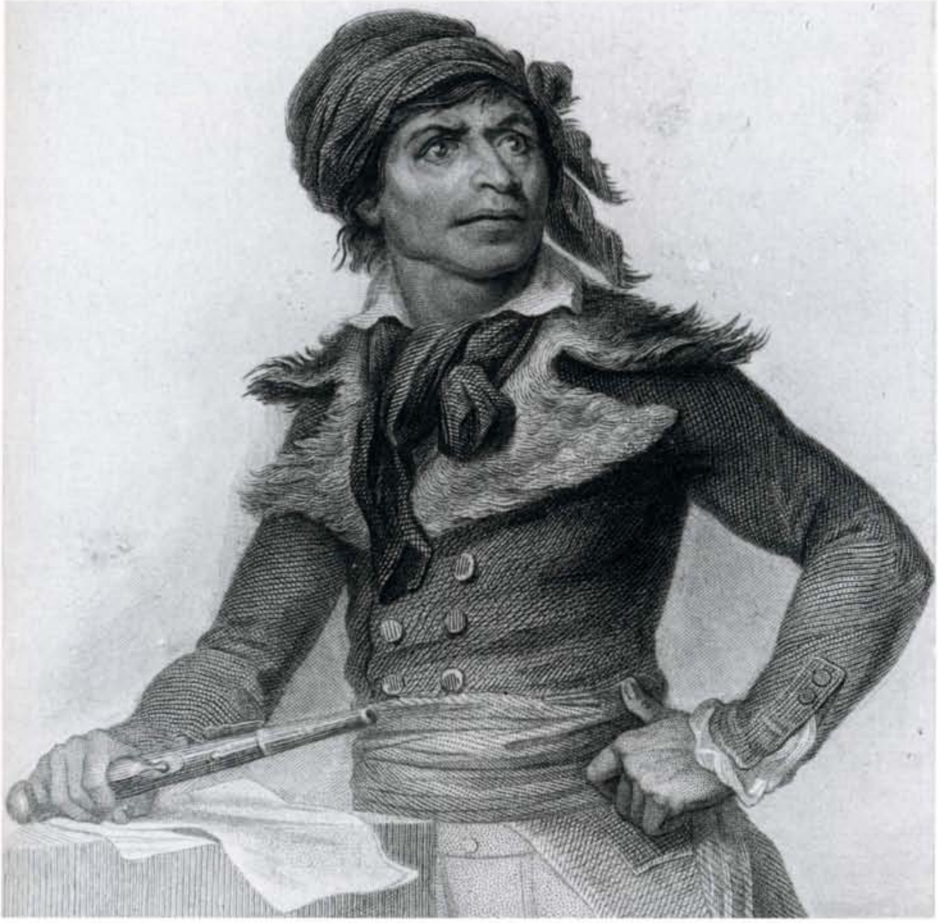


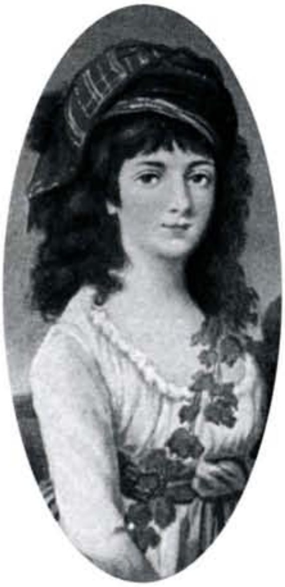
Georges Danton (1759–94) was a leading Jacobin credited with a major share in the overthrow of the monarchy. Later, however, he attempted to moderate revolutionary excesses, in the course of which he himself was sentenced to the guillotine. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

had been a major casualty of Revolutionary doctrine: half the officers had emigrated, others distrusted their men who had been infected with the slogans of equal rights. The navy had been similarly affected.

The reverses suffered by the army provoked the people of Paris into a bloody uprising and demands for a new Assembly to be elected by universal male suffrage, together with a Revolutionary tribunal to weed out and condemn the aristocrats and wealthy 'traitors' deemed responsible for the enemies' successes. From the start the Revolution had been driven from ground level by popular resentment and atrocity. Now atrocity was formalized as state terror.

It was administered by a new National Convention elected by about 10 per cent of eligible voters – men over 25 – and 47 per cent of those elected were lawyers. Reflecting the radical mood on the streets, the Convention abolished the monarchy, declared a republic and pronounced the date of the inaugural session, 20 September 1792, the start of Year One of National Liberty. Afterwards, Louis XVI was placed on trial, found guilty of treason – to the Revolution – and sent to the guillotine. The army, meanwhile, had halted the enemy and pushed





ABOVE

Charlotte Corday (1768–93) was a 25-year-old supporter of moderate 'Girondin' elements driven from the National Convention by the Jacobin Cabal; determined to demonstrate her loathing for the direction these men were taking France, she stabbed Marat in his bath. She went to the guillotine. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

LEFT

Jean-Paul Marat (1743–93), another leading Jacobin, was a Swiss-born doctor whose speeches and articles inflamed the fears and hatreds of the populace and led directly to street riots and massacres. He justified 'the Terror' as 'the despotism of liberty', which was necessary to 'crush the despotism of kings'. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

forward into Belgium, and believing Britain would now join the enemy alliance, the Convention declared war on both Britain and the Dutch republic (February 1793) and Spain the following month. To harness the human and material resources of the country against the world of enemies it had called up, the Convention established a command economy under the control of the notorious Committee of Public Safety. War industries were nationalized, 300,000 young men without children were conscripted for the fighting fronts, fathers deployed to manufacture arms and ammunition and women to make uniforms. Prices of essential foods were controlled, bread rationed, crops and cattle requisitioned, the export of French goods and capital prohibited; to ensure compliance, surveillance committees were established in every city section and country commune to denounce traitors and food hoarders; deputies were despatched with companies of fanatical Parisian Revolutionary militias to cities and regions which had openly revolted against Paris with plenary powers to root out and punish traitors; also to naval bases and army units to ensure the loyalty of officers and men. The Revolution, begun at the ideological level in the hope of ushering in a new era of equality, freedom and happiness, had been transformed into a totalitarian dictatorship ruling by the guillotine and carrying its message to Europe by war; as one of the chief ideologues in the Convention proclaimed, 'the moment has come for the temporary organization of the despotism of liberty in order to crush the despotism of kings'[30] – recalling Rousseau's paradox of the individual forced to be free.

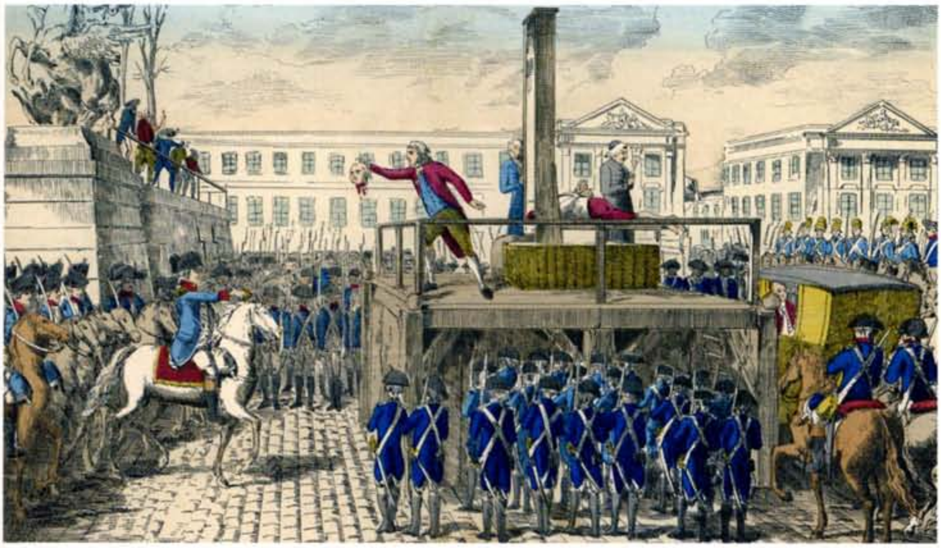
Apologists for the Revolution claim that dictatorship and 'the Terror' were consequences of the desperate state of affairs in France; once the external enemies had been repulsed and the internal counter-revolutions suppressed – as they were by the most barbaric measures foreshadowing 20th-century mass atrocities – controls and 'Terror' were dismantled. Yet the move towards extreme centralization and uniformity, the use of surveillance, informers and arbitrary arrest had been apparent within months of the meeting of the Estates General. The true paradox of the Revolution is that, after erasing the old order, it had to re-erect the old institutions of control in monstrous form. It was entirely predictable. Edmund Burke did predict it; and as early as February 1790 warned the British people against imitating 'the excesses of an irrational, unprincipled, proscribing, confiscating, plundering, ferocious, bloody and tyrannical democracy'.[31]

In his *Reflections*, written in summer 1790, Burke provided a remarkably accurate forecast of the nature of the regime, known as the Directorate, which followed 'the Terror' in Year III (1795), composed of 'directors of assignats [government bonds originally issued for the purchase of nationalized Church property, subsequently used as paper money] and trustees for the sale of Church lands, attorneys, agents, money-jobbers, speculators and adventurers.'[32] And after this ruling oligarchy, he predicted the advent of a military dictatorship under a 'popular general':

> Armies will obey him on his personal account ... the moment in which that shall happen, the person who really commands the army is your master ... the master of your assembly, the master of your whole republic.[33]

Napoleon Bonaparte fulfilled this prediction precisely in Year VIII (1799), and five years later after a string of military victories, crowned himself emperor. Napoleon was the ultimate rationalizer and centralizer. He had every area of French life codified and enforced uniformly throughout France by *préfets*, each administering one of the *départements* into which the country had been divided, as in Bourbon times intendants had administered regions. This was in complete contrast to local government in Britain where each county, town and even parish looked after its own affairs largely ignored by the central administration. Napoleon's *préfets*, guided by increasingly detailed regulations, fed a mountainous correspondence with the Minister of the Interior.

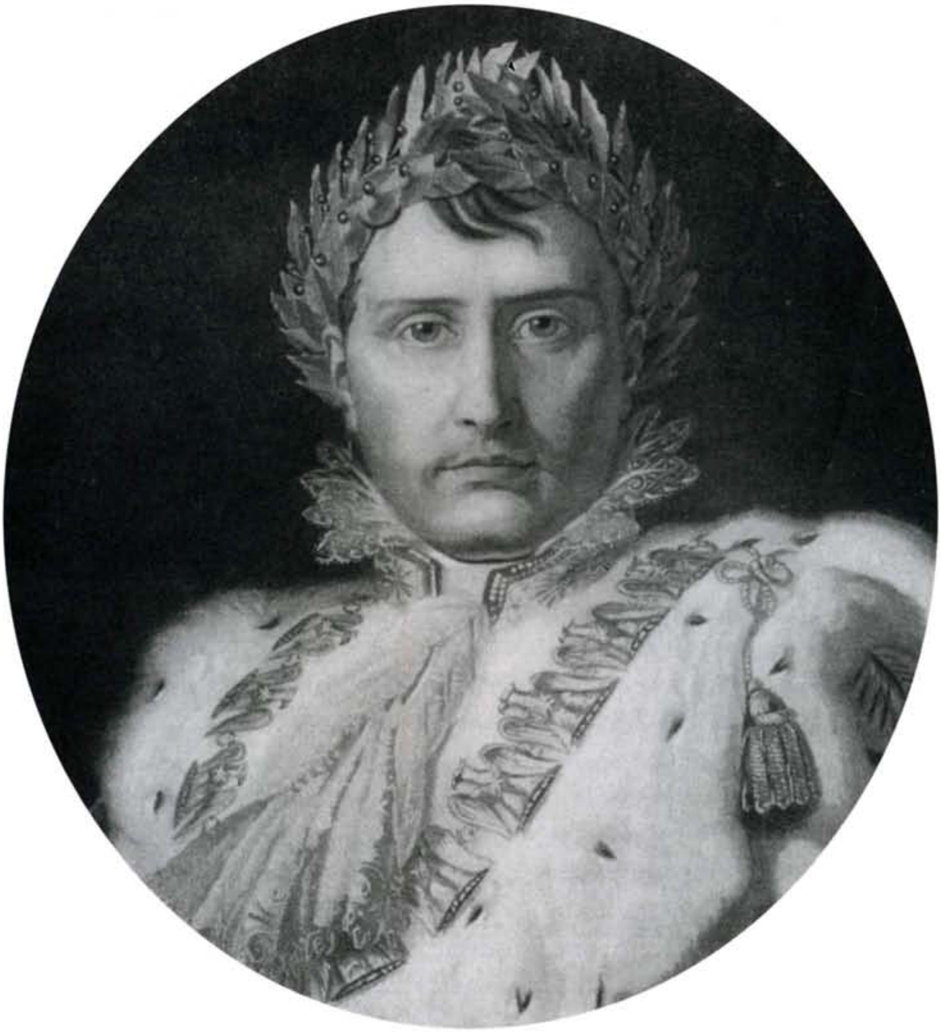
Like the Bourbons, Napoleon appointed ministers, generals, senior civil servants and members of the Council of State through which he ruled. Retaining an elected legislative assembly as a symbolic gesture to the ideals of the Revolution,



The execution of Louis XVI on 20 January 1793 marked the real birth of the Republic. Rising at 5 a.m. on a cold, wet morning, he was escorted by a huge guard to the guillotine, accompanied by an English priest, Henry Edgeworth, with whom he recited psalms. His final address to the multitude of armed citizenry was, 'I die innocent of all the crimes laid to my charge; I pardon those who have occasioned my death; and I pray to God that the blood you are going to shed may never be visited upon France.' His bloody head was held up to cries of '*Vive la Republique!*' (Mary Evans Picture Library)

he emptied it of all power; and appointed safe men to a tame Senate. To restore values in the community, he brought back distinctions and created 18 Marshals of France as an emphatically military upper echelon of a new social hierarchy, endowing them with princely titles, lands and salaries. He strengthened the police, particularly the secret police, whose powers of arbitrary arrest, detention without trial, torture and even murder were used increasingly as opposition to his rule grew – assisted with British secret service funds – and imposed a rigorous press censorship. The result of Trafalgar was withheld for months, then reported as several ships lost after an imprudently delivered battle; the French commander-in-chief was expunged from the record. He was later found dead in an inn with several knife wounds and a suicide note. He was certainly murdered, possibly on the direct orders of Napoleon. As intellectual monitor, Napoleon established a University of France to supervise education throughout the empire and indoctrinate the young with the ideal of serving and dying for *la patrie*.

The Revolution had come full circle: from absolute monarchy, through the fiction of the 'general will' of the people to the absolute will of an emperor, always at the opposite pole to the British system; and it remained crucially inferior in the fields of finance, trade and industry. The National Convention had created a disastrous inflation of the *assignat* by printing it to excess. Napoleon stabilized the currency by tying the coinage to gold and silver and prohibiting the mass issue of paper money; but since he could not borrow on the security of the nation represented in open assembly, loans were tied to his reputation, as they had been for the Bourbons. At first military success enabled him to borrow at rates scarcely above those on British government debt, but when his star waned rates climbed. In any case, he distrusted borrowing, regarding it as an index of overspending. Instead the imperial budget was balanced with contributions from conquered enemies in the form of huge war indemnities, taxes, forced levies and simple theft. This necessarily produced diminishing returns, inducing further conquest.



The French Revolution turned full circle in December 1804 with General Bonaparte's self-elevation into the Emperor Napoleon - he literally seized the crown from the hands of the Pope and placed it on his own head. The position carried rights of succession for his heirs, and other trappings of the old order of nobility followed. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

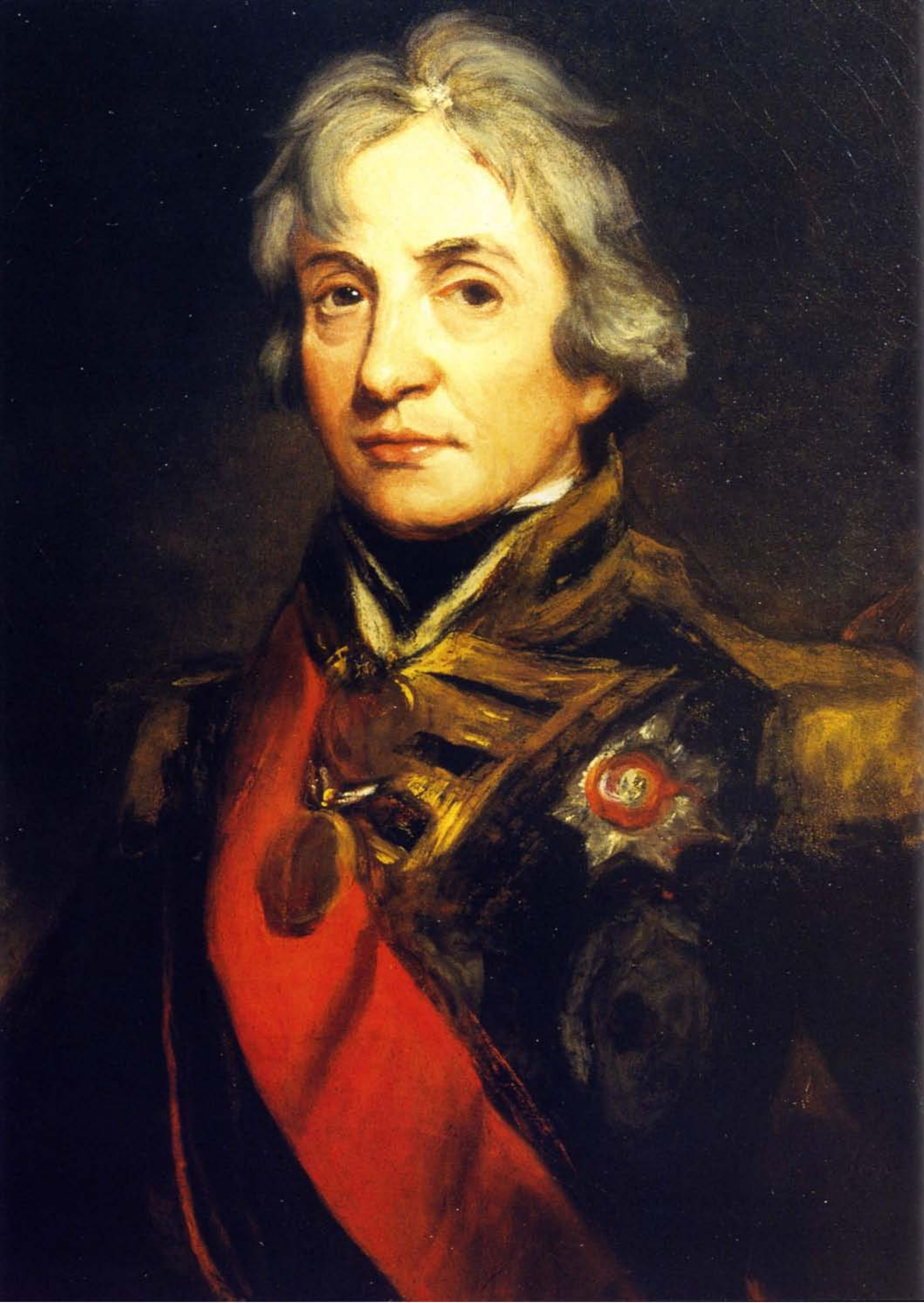
Yet it was his determination to bring down Great Britain, the constant obstacle to his mastery in Europe, that drove him beyond his means. The obvious solution was invasion. When Trafalgar showed he could never hope to cross the Channel, he resolved to ruin the trade on which Britain's strength depended. He had already begun: British goods were banned from all ports under his control – the secondary consequence of which was a protected market for French goods which helped in the short term but ensured that French manufacturers would emerge from the war even less competitive with their British counterparts than before. However, it was his campaign to enforce a continent-wide blockade of British goods that led him to disaster. Attempting to stop British trade flowing into Europe through the Baltic ports, he encroached on the economic interests of the Tsar of Russia and was drawn into his fatal march ending in Moscow, humiliating retreat and the loss of his army. He never fully recovered.

In the decisive arena at sea, Horatio Nelson was the peerless champion of the British system. His was a conservative and intuitive rather than intellectual mind, and his patriotism was as instinctive as his belief in the God he had been taught to worship from his earliest days in his father's rectory. He hated the French and distrusted them. Naturally: they had been his country's enemy from before living memory; as he wrote once when refusing to take French Royalists aboard his ships, 'Forgive me; but my mother hated the French'.[34] As captain of the *Agamemnon* at the start of the Revolutionary War, he enjoined his midshipmen, first, that they must implicitly obey orders, 'secondly, you must consider every man your enemy who speaks ill of your king; thirdly, you must hate a Frenchman as you do the devil !'[35] By this time the ideologues in Paris had given him every reason for hating them by displaying fanatical atheism and executing their king.

Whatever the nature of his dislike, it fitted well with his overriding desire for personal distinction in action, although it never outweighed his concern for individuals. At the height of the battle of the Nile when the French flagship was ablaze and expected to blow apart, his first thought was to order boats to rescue her sailors. And in the last entry he made in his diary before action at Trafalgar when praying for 'a great and glorious victory', he added, 'may humanity after victory be the predominant feature in the British fleet'; after which he committed himself to his maker, together with 'the just cause which is entrusted to me to defend. Amen. Amen. Amen.'[36]

Napoleon had lost faith in his admirals and his navy long before Trafalgar. Nelson, when he defeated the Franco-Spanish fleet, was in a sense cashing the cheque won by the Royal Navy's operational superiority and constant vigilance. In terms of the war, Trafalgar was the final proof for Napoleon that he could neither invade Britain nor break out from continental Europe; nor could he prevent British military, commercial and political interference on the maritime fringes of his empire. His efforts to solve that punishing irregularity drew him into ever rasher adventures, and final disaster. In a more profound sense, his defeat at Waterloo in 1815 was the conclusion of over a century of Franco-British struggle. He was the ultimate expression of France's martial ethos, as Nelson was arguably the extreme example of Britain's will to rule the seas. The result of this final phase of the contest during which each side reverted to its naked character, the warrior horde against the ruthless merchant trader, proved, so far as any historical phenomenon is capable of scientific demonstration, that the French political system and culture formed from and dominated by land-holding values could not compete with the opposing merchant culture protected by and in command of the seas. Finally trade proved stronger than plunder. And after Napoleon's defeat Britain was able to project Pitt's goals of free trade, financial probity and liberal ideals on to France, western Europe and subsequently much of the rest of the world, which it transformed in its own image.

The most eloquent defence of the British system was mounted by Edmund Burke, its most precious value the freedom of the individual, which Burke claimed 'as an entailed inheritance derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity'.[37] Beside his organic view of the progress of society, the theories of the Revolutionaries appear in the light of history as dangerous fantasies.



CHAPTER TWO

NELSON THE MAN

EDGAR VINCENT

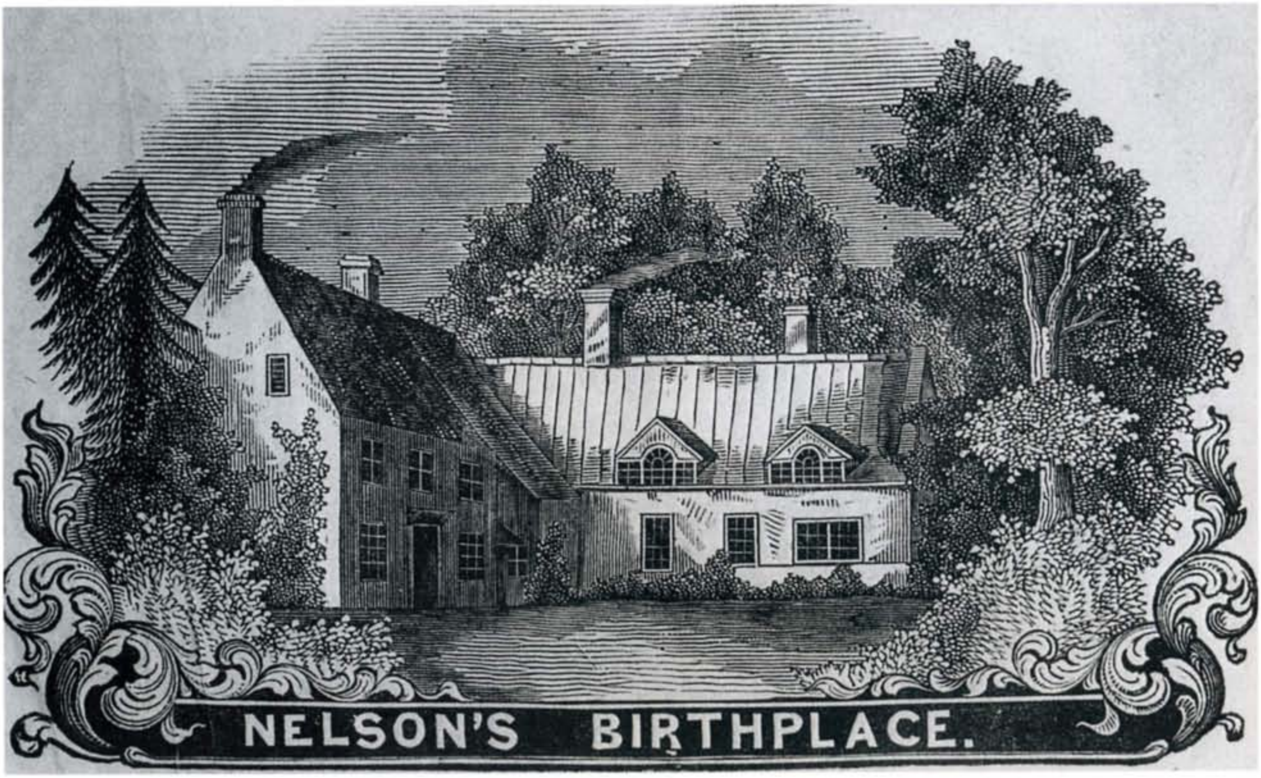
In the short space of eight years, 1797–1805, Nelson ascended from hero to living legend and then to icon of the nation. The crowds and public emotion at his funeral would not be equalled until those for Princess Diana in our own time. He died in the hour of victory, in a battle that released his country from imminent danger of invasion. Trafalgar was an episode as potent for the British as the Battle of Britain in 1940.

Hundreds of books have been written about Nelson, many of them hagiographic or hero worshipping, many derived from the books of others. Carola Oman began to rebuild on the primary sources available to her at the time, and in her *Nelson* (1947) produced a compelling narrative out of which emerged an engaging and likeable figure. More recently, new discoveries, wider and deeper research, more penetrating questions and less inhibited writers have enabled a badly needed warts-and-all approach, exemplified in particular by Tom Pocock's *Horatio Nelson* (1987), a realistic portrait balanced with recognition of Nelson's human weaknesses, Terry Coleman's revisionist *Nelson: The Man and the Legend* (2001) which portrays an even more flawed human being with few redeeming features, and Edgar Vincent's *Nelson: Love & Fame* (2003) which interweaves Nelson's professional and personal life and explores his motivations and the many contradictions and paradoxes in his charismatic character. But whatever the differing assessments of Nelson the man, his capacity to lead and inspire, to command great fleets and lead them to victory, is unassailable. And never did a fighting commander inspire such love, affection and emulation. His column in Trafalgar Square places him on a higher pedestal than any other hero or any king in the nation's history.

MILESTONES IN NELSON'S LIFE

Horatio Nelson was born on 29 September 1758 at Burnham Thorpe in Norfolk where his father was Rector. He was the fourth of eight children who survived

OPPOSITE
Nelson in 1800 by John Hoppner. According to Nelson's chaplain, Alexander Scott, this was Nelson's second best likeness after de Koster. (Royal Naval Museum)


NELSON'S BIRTHPLACE.

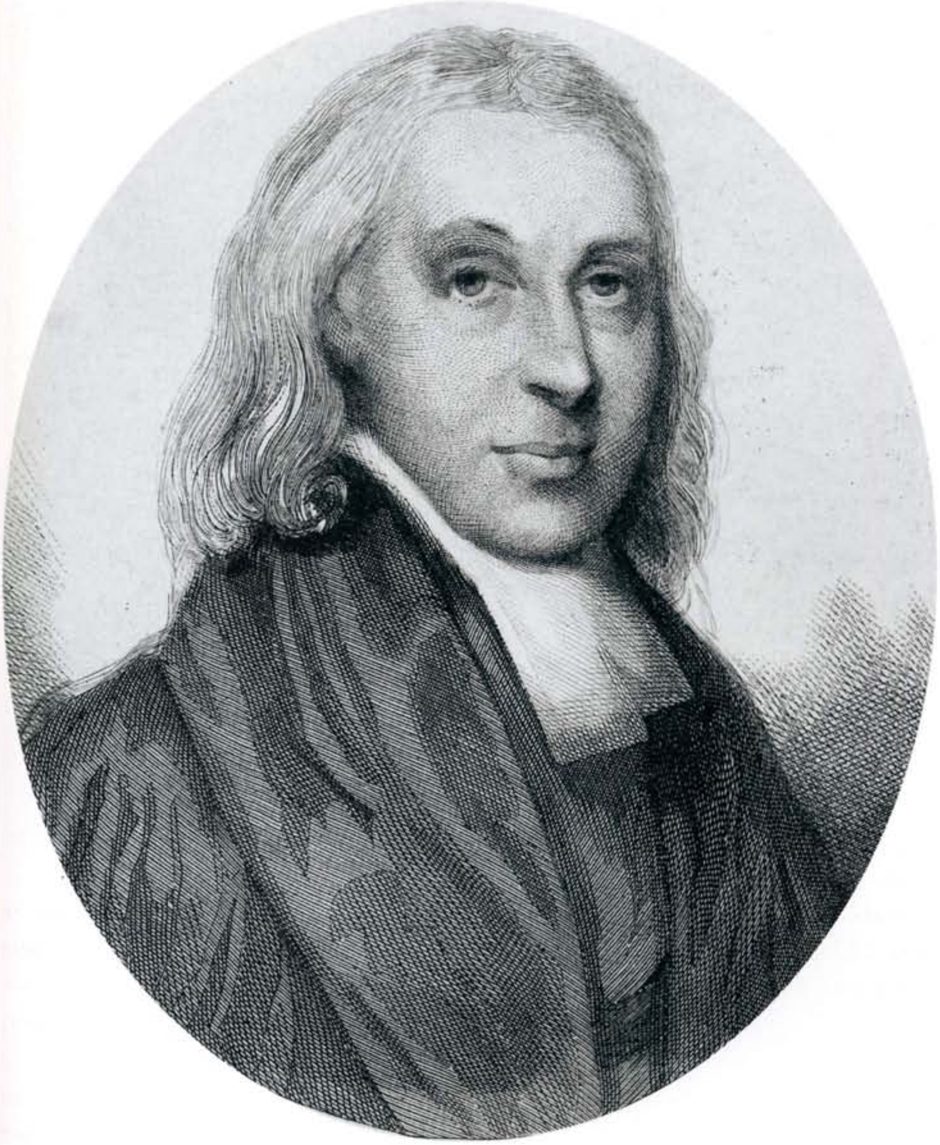
Nelson's birthplace. Burnham Thorpe parsonage where Nelson was born in September 1758, spent his early childhood and later spent the years 1788–93 as a newly wed and unemployed officer. (Royal Naval Museum)

infancy. He went to sea in 1771 at the age of 12½. All but 7½ of his remaining years were spent at sea.

Nelson married Frances (Fanny) Nisbet in the West Indies in 1787 when he was 28. On the outbreak of war with revolutionary France in 1793 he was appointed to the Mediterranean fleet under Admiral Hood but his star did not rise until 1797 when, aged 39, he was the hero of the battle of Cape St Vincent, for which he received a knighthood and his commander-in-chief Sir John Jervis an earldom. The next year (1798), his stupendous victory over the French at the battle of the Nile made him a living legend and a peer. Two years at Naples led to his involvement in Neapolitan politics and his entanglement with Emma Hamilton, wife of the British envoy Sir William Hamilton. He returned to England with the Hamiltons in July 1800. Separation from his wife, the birth of his illegitimate daughter Horatia (conceived in Naples), and the battle of Copenhagen, for which he was made Viscount, followed in 1801. The Peace of Amiens brought him on shore in late 1801 to his newly acquired house, Merton Place, where he lived with Emma until the final Trafalgar campaign which for him began in May 1803 and culminated in his death at Trafalgar on October 21 1805 aged 47.

WHAT SHAPED NELSON?

Nelson was a small boy, only 5 foot 6 inches as a man and slightly built; small men are frequently assertive and Nelson certainly was. It has been said that

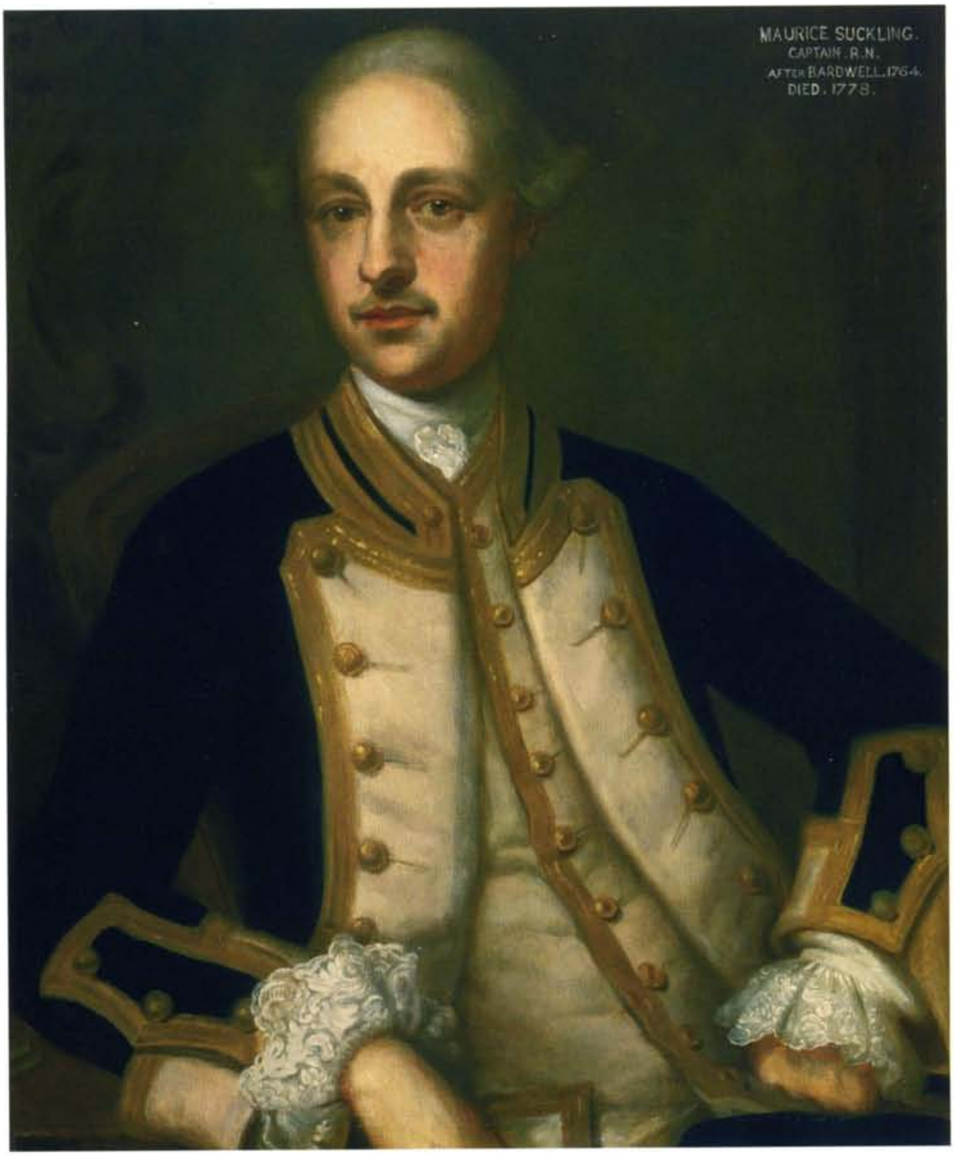


Nelson's father (1722–1802). Edmund Nelson, good natured and rather whimsical, something of a hypochondriac, 'easily put in a fuss', 'tremulous over trifles.' Befriended by Nelson's wife. Not as significant a person in Nelson's life as other father figures Captain Locker and Admirals Hood and St Vincent. (Royal Naval Museum)

children of ministers of religion think of themselves as different and it is evident that Nelson always had a very high opinion of himself. He lost his mother when he was nine; there is ample evidence to suggest that early death of a parent provides a powerful motive force for a child who has the capacity and opportunity for great achievement.

On the other hand, Nelson's genetic inheritance seems to have been unremarkable. True, his mother's great-grandmother had been sister of Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole, and his mother's brother was a naval captain destined to become Comptroller of the Navy, but his father was ineffectual and something of a hypochondriac, his brothers and sisters nothing out of the ordinary. He was a middle child in a large family, needing to compete for maternal attention and possibly perceiving a lack of it. This, together with his mother's

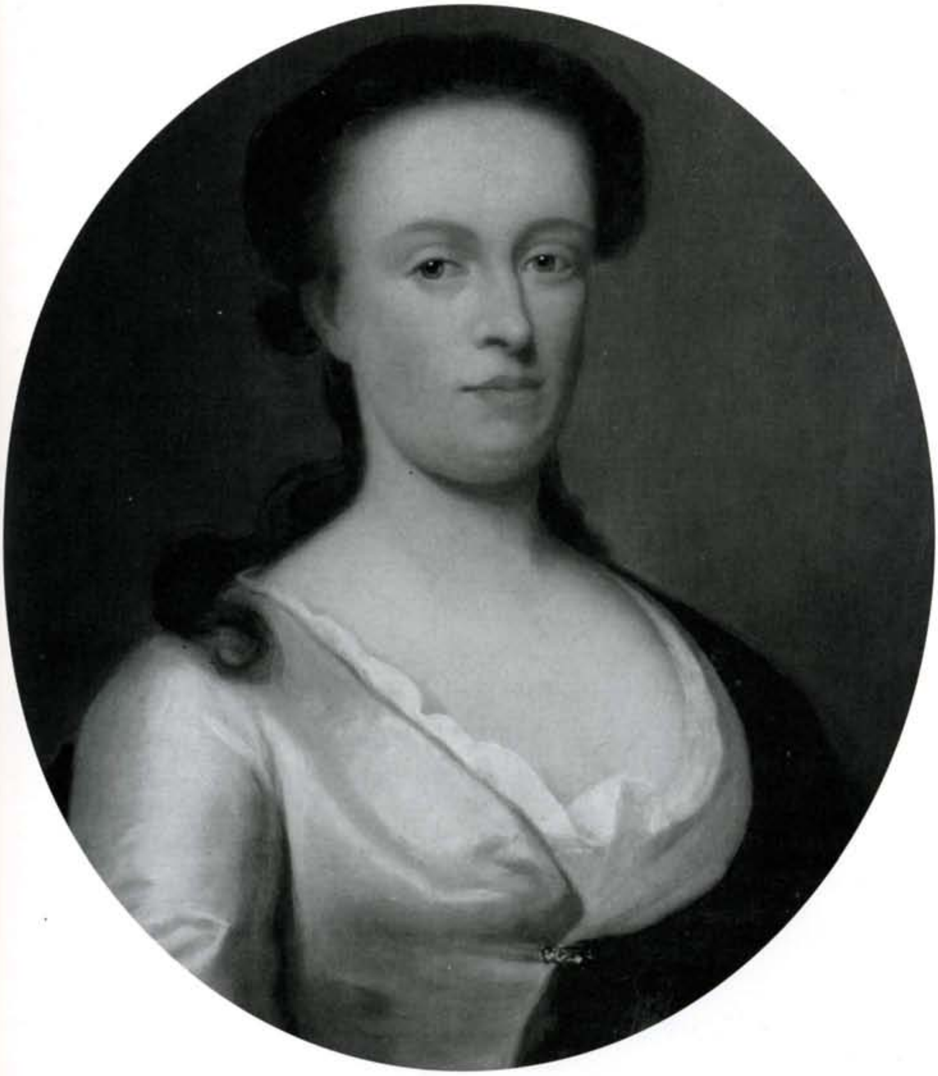
Nelson's uncle (1725–78). Captain Maurice Suckling took Nelson to sea in 1771, to help his widowed brother-in-law to provide for his family. He was a wonderful surrogate father to Nelson, using his influence to get him the right opportunities, especially when he became Comptroller of the Navy. (National Maritime Museum)


MAURICE SUCKLING.
CAPTAIN. R.N.
AFTER BARDWELL.1764.
DIED. 1778.

early death, may explain Nelson's constant craving for attention and his seemingly insatiable need to be liked and loved, both indicative of inner insecurities. Still a child when he went to sea, important formative years were spent in the Navy, an all-male hierarchic institution. From the beginning, Nelson seems to have fitted that mould. The Navy quickly became the centre of his life and remained so.

MOTIVATION AND GUIDING FORCES IN HIS LIFE

Nelson was always self-directed. He pushed himself forward to be taken to sea by his uncle Maurice Suckling. He pushed himself forward for a succession of new experiences, a polar expedition, a voyage to India and the Persian Gulf. True, his uncle, a captain in the Navy, had sufficient pull to enable the young



Nelson's mother (1725–67). Catherine Nelson died when Nelson was nine after bearing 11 children. He referred to her only twice in his voluminous correspondence, but her enthusiasm for the Navy and her captain brother probably provided the impetus for Nelson's career choice. Nelson said he had learned his hatred of the French at his mother's knee. (National Maritime Museum)

Nelson to achieve his ambitions, but he would always thrust himself forward. There was nothing of the shrinking violet in Nelson.

As a convalescent young man returning from India in 1776 he decided to be a hero. At least that is how he recounted his experience some 25 years later:

> I felt impressed with an idea that I should never rise in my profession. My mind was staggered with a view of the difficulties I had to surmount and the little interest I possessed. I could discover no means of reaching the object of my ambition. After a long and gloomy reverie, in which I almost wished myself overboard, a sudden glow of patriotism was kindled within me, and presented my king and country as my patron. My mind exulted in the idea. 'Well then, I exclaimed, I will be a hero, and confiding in Providence I will brave every danger.'

His huge latent ambition could now be focused and whatever the accuracy of his recollection the rest of his life was driven by a heroic search for fame and glory and his determination to be a man of destiny.

Much has been made of Nelson's Christian belief. God indeed seems to have been part of his military conviction, personally on his side and by definition against his enemy. He could cast himself in biblical proportions. In a letter to his father following victory at the Nile, the parson's son echoed the spirit of the Old Testament: 'The hand of God was visibly pressed on the French: it is not in the power of man to gain such a victory.' In 1793 his 64-gun *Agamemnon* chased and outfought a heavy French frigate only to be cornered by three more. Together his enemies had more than twice his firepower and four times his manpower; he escaped but it was a very close call. That night he entered in his journal the words, 'Though I know neither the time nor the manner of my death, I am not at all solicitous about it, because I am sure He knows them both, and that he will not fail to support and comfort me under them.' Here was the source of his legendary courage, his sense that death would come when it would come and that his God would enable him to bear it. When he left Merton for the last time he was still the trusting and believing fatalist:

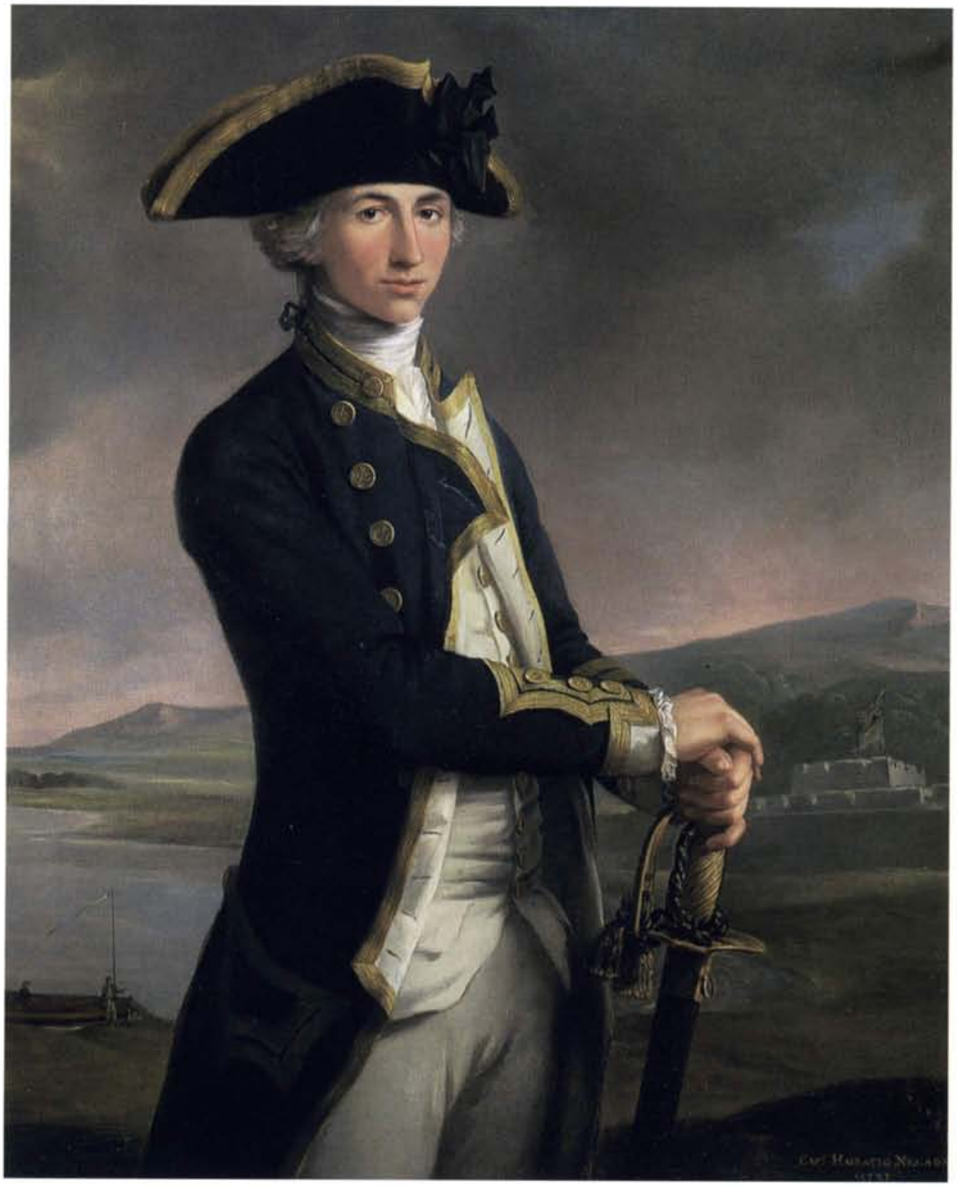
> May the great God whom I adore enable me to fulfil the expectations of my country and if it is His good pleasure that I should return, my thanks will never cease being offered up to his Throne of Mercy. If it is his good providence to cut short my days upon earth, I bow with the greatest submission, relying that he will protect those so dear to me, that I may leave behind – His will be done Amen, Amen, Amen.

Just before the battle he went to his cabin and wrote his famous final prayer. Both prayers were exalted expressions of the way Nelson, throughout his life, steeled himself to meet the possibility of death.

During his affair with Emma Hamilton, Nelson persuaded himself that his motives were pure because he wanted to marry her. In September 1805 he took communion with Emma, declaring before the priest, 'Emma I have taken the Sacrament with you this day to prove to the world that our friendship is most pure and innocent, and of this I call God to witness.' As he lay dying he was heard to say, 'I have not been a great sinner,' even though he had broken at least three commandments. Nelson's religious feeling played an important and sustaining part in his military life but it was like that of many individuals, complex, selective, sometimes contradictory and tailored to meet his own psychological needs. At the scene of his death Nelson's final thoughts joined God and duty: 'Thank God I have done my duty.' Duty was a word that had resonated throughout his life from the time he had written to his complaining fiancée, 'duty is the great business of a sea officer. All private considerations must give way to it however painful it is.' Nelson always put duty and the Navy first. Neither in relation to wife, mistress nor daughter was there any 'All for Love' theme in Nelson's life.

APPEARANCES AND REALITY

The first portrait by John Francis Rigaud begun in May 1777 when Nelson was 19 reveals a charmingly boyish but confident young man. In 1797 when Nelson was 39, Lemuel Abbott painted a portrait which we all recognize with its compellingly serene, kind and resolute gaze. The strangest portrait is Guzzardi's painted in 1798 in Naples, a sad, weary Nelson, the personification of post-traumatic shock. On his way home in 1800 he was painted in Vienna by Heinrich Fuger, a portrait which seems to capture Nelson's ruthlessness; the lips are



Nelson in 1781 by J. F. Rigaud. The young post captain just back from the West Indies in a portrait commissioned by Captain Locker. (Royal Naval Museum) thinner and the nose slightly more aquiline than is generally portrayed; he seems cool and distant. Nelson himself thought the best likeness was a profile sketch by Simon de Koster with its powerful, dominating face, straight nose, firm mouth and chin. His chaplain, the Revd Scott, thought the next best was Hoppner's oil sketch which brings out the softer feminine side of Nelson's personality. Significantly, Emma kept De Koster's miniature in her locket but she was also much moved by Catherine Andras' wax figure in Westminster Abbey, also notable for the power in his face. Nelson's nephew, George Matcham, said it was 'far more like him than any of the portraits.'

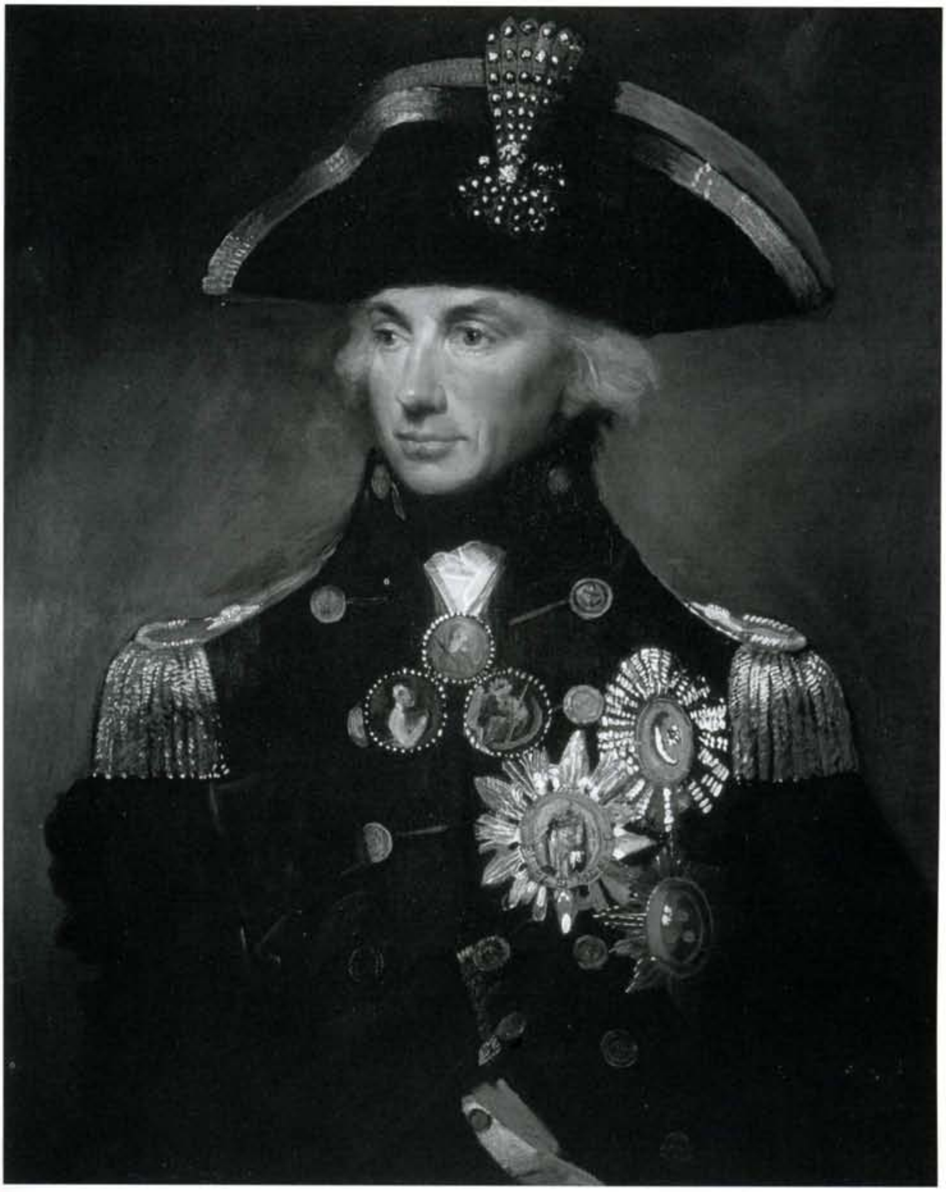
None of these artists appears to have seen quite the same man, hardly surprising in view of Nelson's many-sided character.

CONTRADICTIONS AND PARADOXES

Nelson's behaviour and personality were full of contradictions and paradoxes. He was in essence the most conciliatory, communicative and collaborative of men and yet his fund of aggression went beyond that required even for a successful fighting commander. He had an obsessive appetite for battle, possibly the by-product of his mission to be a hero or of inner insecurities which required him to prove himself time and time again. At the same time, he constantly aroused protective feelings in others. Sick in the West Indies, his friend Captain Cornwallis organized native nursing for him. His commander-in-chief's wife cared for him like a son. His captains Troubridge and Ball were worried and protective about his health and reputation at Palermo. During the Copenhagen campaign Captain Foley doctored him with a regimen of milk at four in the morning and his flag captain Murray dosed him with lozenges. In the earliest phase of his relationship with Emma she nursed and mothered the worn-out and injured little admiral. Maybe it was the combination of intrepid bravery, slight frame and willingness to appear vulnerable that was so potent. Certainly he aroused the mothering instincts of men and women alike.

Nelson demonstrated countless examples of kindness, generosity, thoughtfulness, empathy and sympathy but when he wanted something he was held back neither by diffidence, self respect, nor finer feelings; he was not above manipulating others (putting on quite a performance to wheedle out of Lady Spencer an extraordinary dinner invitation for his wife); emotional blackmail (when putting pressure on his uncle for a loan to enable him to marry); and a ruthless want of feelings (towards a wife he wanted to be rid of).

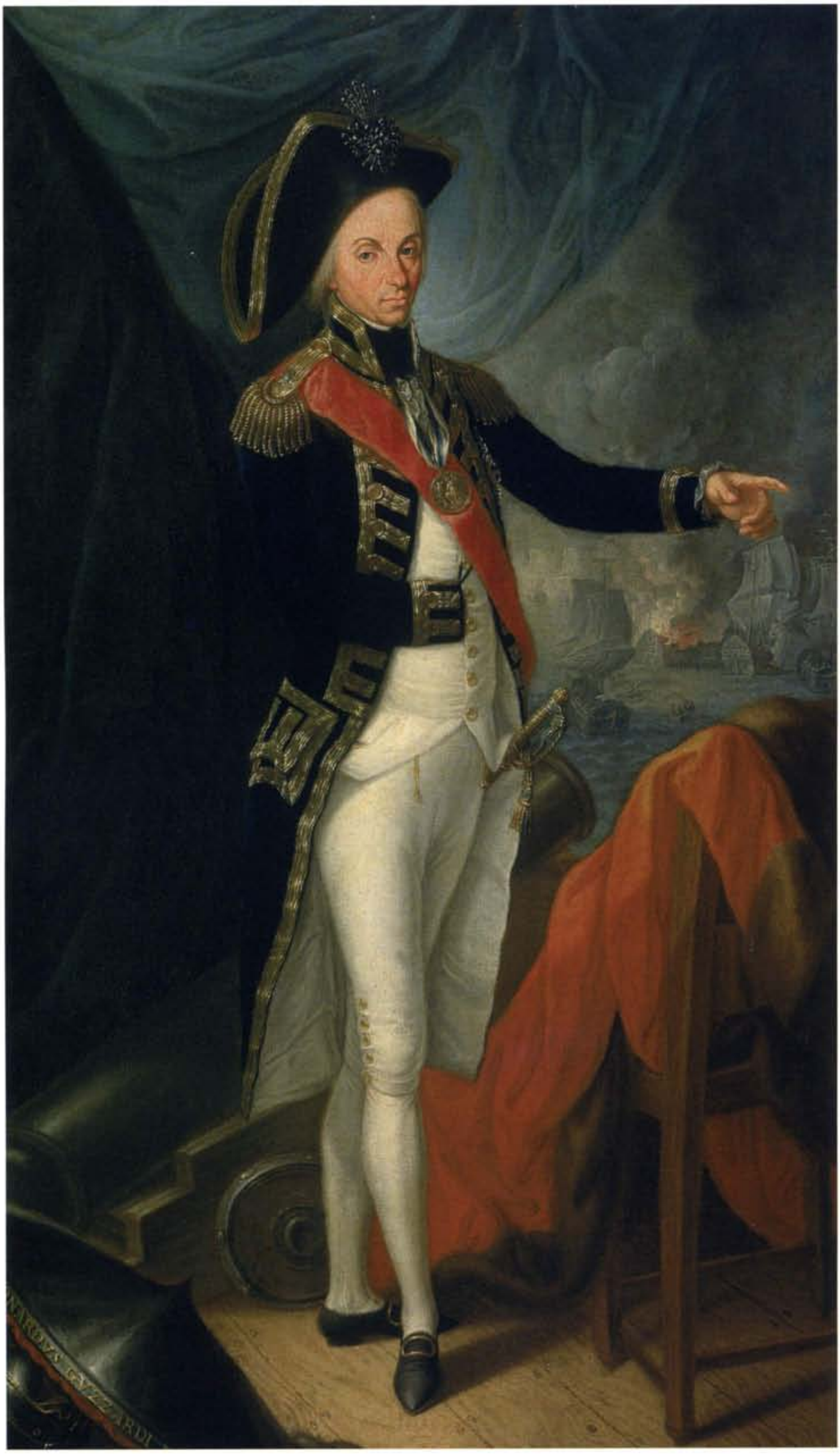
His inspiring self confidence and total self belief, so vital to his success, could on occasions metamorphose into self delusion, not least in his egocentric overestimate of the part he played in the sieges of Bastia and Calvi. There were other bouts of unreality, of sanctimonious grandiosity, referring to himself in the third person as Nelson, especially when somebody dared to question his motives or honesty, writing to the Victualling Board, 'Nelson is so far from doing a scandalous or mean action as the heavens are above the earth.' His sycophantic behaviour towards Prince William, later Duke of Clarence, 'Nothing is wanting



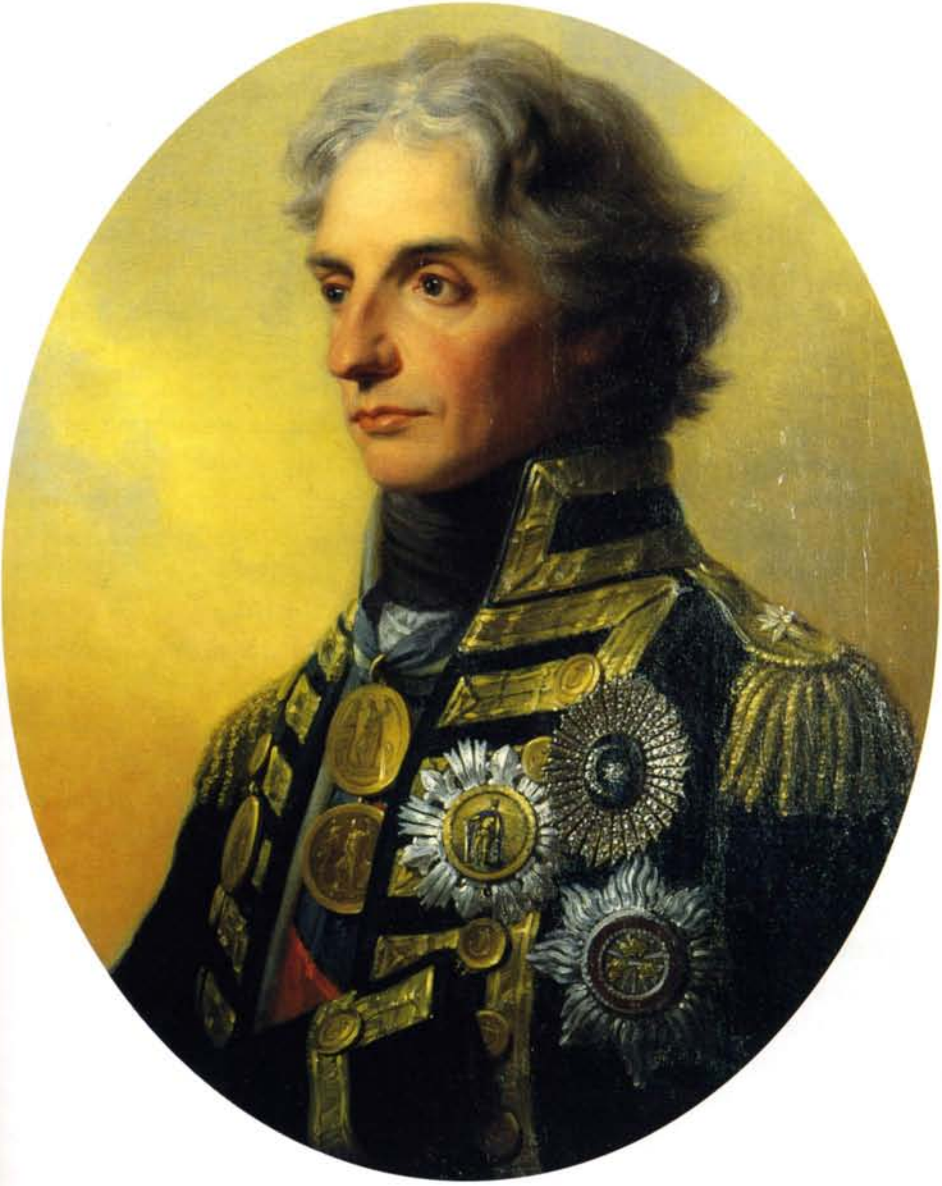
Nelson in 1797 by Lemuel Francis Abbott. The hero of the Nile. Nelson's wife wrote to Nelson 'The likeness is great' and 'our good father was delighted with the likeness.' (National Maritime Museum)

to make you the darling of the English nation,' and towards the King and Queen of Naples, showed a man willing to suspend his critical faculty when dazzled by royalty.

Nelson's constant desire for the limelight, his obsessive need to be first, and his flair for self publicity were all very real. Early experiences had persuaded him never to leave his reputation in the care of others. Thus he wrote his own spellbinding account of the battle of Cape St Vincent. But Nelson's reputation was not based on his own spin. His exploits at St Vincent were being celebrated in naval circles well before his own account reached home; there was nothing fictional about them. Subsequently he went to extraordinary lengths to ensure that his contribution as second-in-command at Copenhagen made its way back



Nelson in 1799 by Leonardo Guzzardi. The hero of the Nile showing the after effects of the cataclysmic battle. (National Maritime Museum)



Nelson in 1800 by Heinrich Fuger. On the way home in a triumphant progress with the Hamiltons. (Royal Naval Museum)

to Prime Minister Addington. In this he was very much his own man, held back neither by a conventional sense of loyalty nor inhibitions about indulging in organization politics.

Along with his love of the limelight went a streak of what is usually called vanity but perhaps ought to be described as exhibitionism, or a wish to singularize himself, an aspect of his need for attention. He liked his medals and stars (as indeed have many other military commanders). He told Colonel Drinkwater in the aftermath of the battle of Cape St Vincent that he would prefer a knighthood because it would provide visible evidence of his contribution (in its red sash). In July 1800 Sir John Moore, the future hero of Corunna (who had been seen by Nelson as an unconstructive army officer during the Corsica campaign) saw him at Leghorn, 'covered with stars, ribbons and medals, more like a prince of an opera than the conqueror of the Nile.' In 1801, when Nelson stopped off on his way to Plymouth to see St Vincent now first Lord of Admiralty, St Vincent wrote, 'Poor man he is devoured with vanity, weakness and folly, was strung with ribbons medals etc. and yet pretended that he wished to avoid the honour and ceremonies he met everywhere on the road.'(Perhaps St Vincent had become rather envious of Nelson and perhaps a little piqued at having lost their dispute over prize money.) In the same vein is the celebrated account by Wellington of their single meeting when at first he found Nelson to be 'a light and trivial character', that is until Nelson, according to Wellington, found out who Wellington was and changed his tune. (The patronizing tone of this account says as much about Wellington's snobbish arrogance as it does about Nelson's alleged behaviour.)

Nelson always put glory and fame, defeating the enemy, before prize money. One of the attractions of life in the navy was the opportunity for prize money, a kind of 18th-century incentive bonus. Nelson, like Hood, never put prize money first, although he could be jaundiced and envious of those who were more money-minded or luckier than he was, or seemed to have been put in the way of earning more than himself. There was in him a constant yearning for money. He could never get over the fact that St Vincent and Duncan both were awarded bigger pensions for their victories. Yet he was never mean, was generous towards his family, was a great giver of presents to all and sundry and could deny Emma nothing, even when his finances were at their most precarious and she was spending money like a drunken sailor.

NELSON'S PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

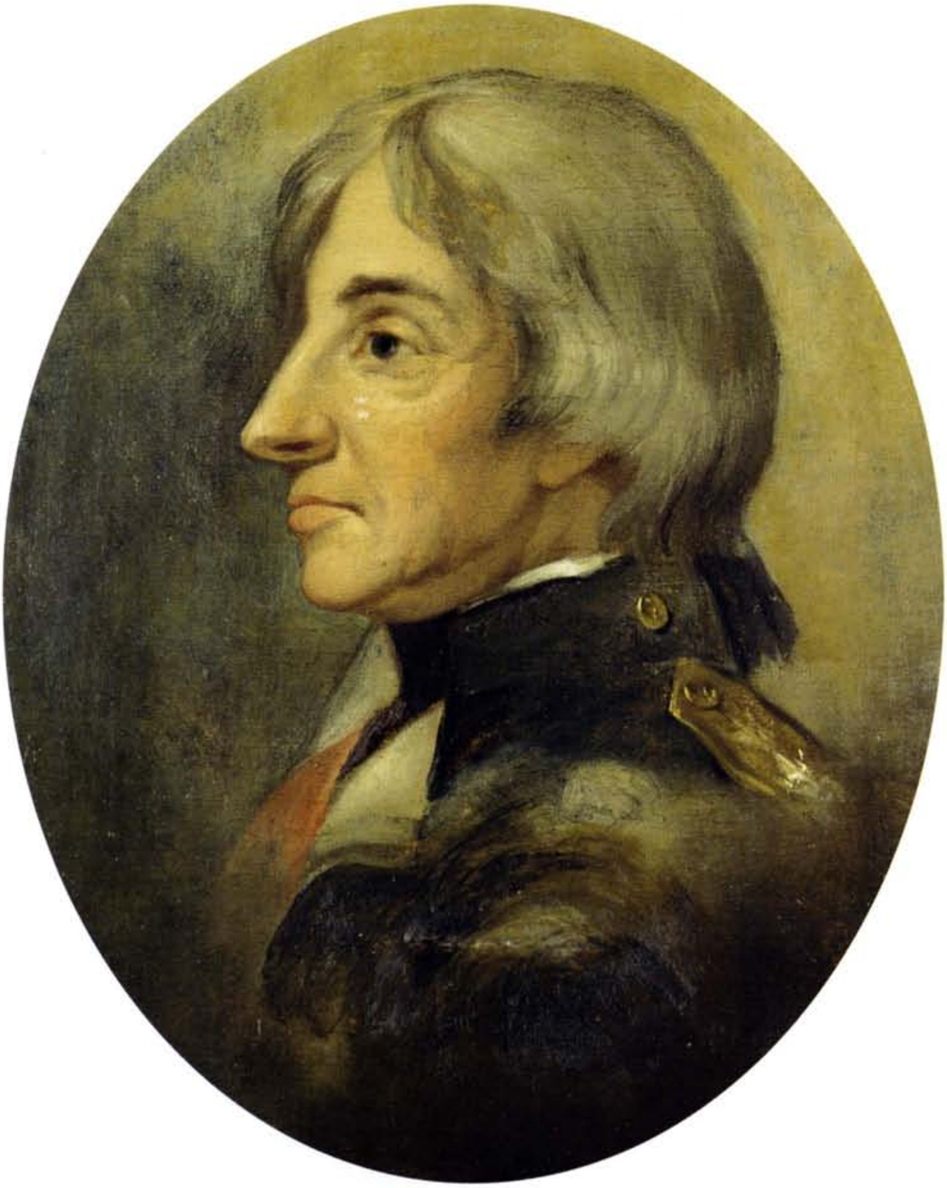
Nelson's physical courage and mental energy coexisted with bouts of self pity, depression and intense preoccupation with his health. At times his behaviour suggests mental imbalance. His grandiose sense of self importance, unreasonable expectations of reward and recognition, attention-seeking theatricality, mood swings and emotionalism, may strike observers as abnormal, but like his physical symptoms, they neither impaired his social functioning nor his professional performance. Whatever his low mental state, the prospect of action instantly revived him. The idea that he developed a death wish and went into Trafalgar determined to be killed is singularly unlikely. He had too much to live for.

Nelson's medical history was remarkable. He lost the use of one eye at Calvi and later became worried by deterioration in his good eye. He suffered a blow to the belly at St Vincent and thereafter from a hernia. The amputation of his right arm without anaesthetic after the attack on Santa Cruz, bad enough in itself, led to prolonged painful after-effects. He suffered a head wound at the Nile and from time to time thereafter experienced a set of physically real symptoms, tentatively diagnosed by today's medical specialists as soldier's heart, angina, urinary tract infection and post-traumatic shock, some of his symptoms being of a psychosomatic nature. Given the immense burdens of command, the stress of battle and endless active service, it is not surprising that he frequently felt weaker and sicker than his doctors pronounced him to be. However, the autopsy done after Trafalgar by Dr Beatty showed that 'all the vital organs were so perfectly healthy in their appearance, and so small, that they resembled more those of a youth than a man who had attained his forty-seventh year; which state of the body, associated with habits of life favourable to health, gives every reason to believe that his Lordship might have lived to a great age,' a belief supported by the fact that his father survived till his 79th year and his sisters (Nelson's aunts) till they were 82 and 93 respectively.

FEELINGS AND FRIENDSHIPS

Nelson never bottled up his feelings. He wore his heart on his sleeve. If he was hurt, cast down, worried or depressed, he expressed it. He wrote to his commander-in chief: 'My heart would break to be near my Commander-in-Chief and not assisting him in such a time. What a state I am in!' To the First Lord he wrote: 'Do not my dear Lord let the Admiralty write harshly to me. My generous soul cannot bear it.' His words to Alexander Davison were typical: 'Believe me my only wish is to sink with honour into the grave and when that shall please God I shall meet death with a smile.' Such emotionalism was part and parcel of Nelson; it must have attracted some, repelled others and left others bemused. Occasionally his inner feelings could be unmanageable. His letters to Emma became hysterical when he suspected that the Prince of Wales was intent on seducing her. His so readily expressed feelings could, however, be shallow and temporary. He had the detachment and ruthlessness necessary in a commander; he seems generally to have shed no tears over his casualties, although later in life after the birth of his daughter, Horatia, he was untypically consumed with grief for Edward Parker, one of his young commanders who died of wounds sustained in the ill-fated raid on Boulogne. While he had gone to the funeral of his old 'sea daddy' Captain Locker, he was deterred by a vaguely described ailment from attending his own father's, which suggests a deep want of feeling.

It was in the nature of naval life that many friendships should be temporary and interrupted, others inhibited by competitive feelings and jealousies typical of any professional and organizational milieu. Because officers attached themselves to more senior officers in the hope of advancement, the stuff of much friendship was really self interest. Alexander Davison, a thrusting entrepreneurial government contractor, has traditionally been called Nelson's friend because he fulfilled a variety of functions as Nelson's agent, banker, public relations agent, confidant and go-between with his wife, in every sense his Mr Fixit. For Davison, Nelson's fame had economic potential and served also to support his energetic social climbing and wider political and commercial networks. On the other hand, his usefulness to Nelson was clearly immense, not least as a source of ready cash. But there were real and enduring friends, Locker, Sir Peter Parker and Collingwood, all dating from his early West Indies days, and Sir Gilbert Elliot, later Lord Minto, who had seen Nelson perform at close quarters when he was



Nelson in 1800 by Simon de Koster. The likeness Nelson preferred, a version of which was kept by Emma in a gold locket. (Royal Naval Museum)

viceroy of Corsica, witnessed the battle of Cape St Vincent, was fond of Emma and was with them at Merton the night before Nelson left for Trafalgar. Along the way Nelson made temporary friends with many officers irresistibly drawn to him by his charisma and reputation. And there were of course those who claimed to be his friend, but in the way of friends of celebrities, were more interested in reflected glory than friendship. On the other hand, Nelson was not greatly liked by officers of different personality and temperament. To imagine that a charismatic leader in a huge organization in the dangerous business of war will be universally admired is an illusion of Nelson worship. Nelson had his detractors on quarter decks and mess decks. His relationship with Emma divided him from some former friends, notably Troubridge, a long standing friend and protégé. Nelson became progressively disenchanted with St Vincent (who he had previously idealized and regarded as his father figure) seeing sides of him he did not like, his legal action over prize money (settled in Nelson's favour only after appeal) and what he perceived as St Vincent's lack of integrity. St Vincent, full of Nelson's praise to his face, never withdrew professional support but seems to have become progressively disillusioned and inclined to be pejorative to others about him. He did not attend Nelson's funeral.

INTELLECT, INTERESTS AND AMBITIONS

Nelson's native intelligence was of a very high order. In action he could rapidly process a multiplicity of variables, instantly decide on the best course of action and pursue it without hesitation. He had the mental energy to assemble arguments and persuade others that the option he was proposing was the best. He had the knack of being positively assertive. After the flag of truce incident at Copenhagen, he showed he was a natural negotiator, never getting himself into a corner, never exceeding his authority, never lost for a counter ploy.

He was a wonderful communicator. In his battle orders his general propositions were clear and compelling and could hardly have been better expressed. Detailed plans could be unclear in exposition and weak in analysis, notably his plan for opposing a French invasion in 1801. His preferred way of operating was face-to-face with his captains, communicating what he expected of them, in general but precise terms. His written instructions to individual captains on individual occasions, were always models of brevity, always clear in what was expected and suffused with a unique quality of confident trust which must have made them a pleasure to receive.

His friendship with Sir William Hamilton seems to have been the friendship of opposites; none of Hamilton's polymathic interests in arts or sciences seem to have rubbed off on Nelson. Uncritical devotees of Nelson make much of his use of Shakespeare but the clear fact is that in all his vast correspondence there are only a few half-remembered quotations. Nelson's wife, Fanny, played the piano but he shows no interest and refers to no favourite pieces. Apart from admiring the doge's palace at Genoa his visual senses are not greatly in evidence. He never managed to speak French and it has to be said that, unlike St Vincent, he showed little application or perseverance in trying to do so. Nelson preferred to act rather than reflect. His mental processes seem to have been governed by instinct and feelings and when those instincts were sound, as in battle, he prospered, but in general he was not overly analytical and not given to intellectualizing. Nelson was a sociable, communicative, well-informed action man of great native intelligence, practical common sense and outstanding professional talent. That he lacked wider cultural, intellectual and political interests made him less interesting as a person in some quarters but as a battle commander it was hardly germane.

Politically speaking, Nelson stood for the established order. Yet his heart was in the right place and he was moved by the hard facts of life as shown by his detailed account to the Duke of Clarence of the insufficiency of the meagre pay of Norfolk farm labourers. He was in all human respects a liberal at heart but he did not at all resonate to progressive political ideas or reformist politicians. Pitt and Wilberforce had opened the campaign for the abolition of slavery in the House of Commons in May 1789, but in his letters Nelson wrote against abolition as late as 1805. And he could be notably chauvinistic, dismissive and contemptuous of Neapolitans and prejudiced against his Portuguese allies. His ambition was narrowly focused. He did not have the grandiose political and personal ambition of a Napoleon. He did not have the political ambition of his contemporary Wellington, who would become Prime Minister. He did not even have the thirst for advancement and place of his mentor Admiral St Vincent, who succeeded Earl Spencer as First Lord of Admiralty. Time might well have produced a different outcome but during his lifetime Nelson cast himself as a hero, an instrument at the disposal of his king and country.

WOMEN, MARRIAGE AND LOVE

The early Nelson found it hard to be successful with women. He was infatuated with two women, Mary Simpson, the garrison commander's daughter in Quebec in 1782, and Elizabeth Andrews, a clergyman's daughter at St Omer in France in 1784. He seems to have been rejected by both. Then came his sentimental attachment to Mary Moutray, wife of the resident naval commissioner in Antigua which ended in 1785 when she returned to England. Two months later he met Frances Nisbet, a widow with a young son, Josiah, and rapidly reached an understanding with her, although they were not married until March 1787. Nelson's impetuous search for a wife had come to an end. Sentiments he expressed to his brother would have found favour with Jane Austen, his desire to be a good husband, his willingness to take responsibility for making the marriage work, his wholehearted acceptance of Fanny's child, the overall sense that he was looking for a companionable marriage based on mutual respect and affection. It is open to doubt whether he felt passionately about Fanny, or whether he was more in love with the idea of love. There was no indication in their voluminous correspondence of shared interests and time showed that their temperaments could not have been more diametrically opposed. Their early years of marriage were spent living with his father in cold Norfolk, bringing neither sign nor mention of a child of their own. When Nelson returned to sea in 1793, he left a wife who could not have been more unsuited to being a sailor's wife. Although parting on friendly terms, Nelson seems to have suffered no pangs at leaving Fanny behind. Within a year he was conducting an affair with Adelaide Correglia, an 'opera singer' in Leghorn.

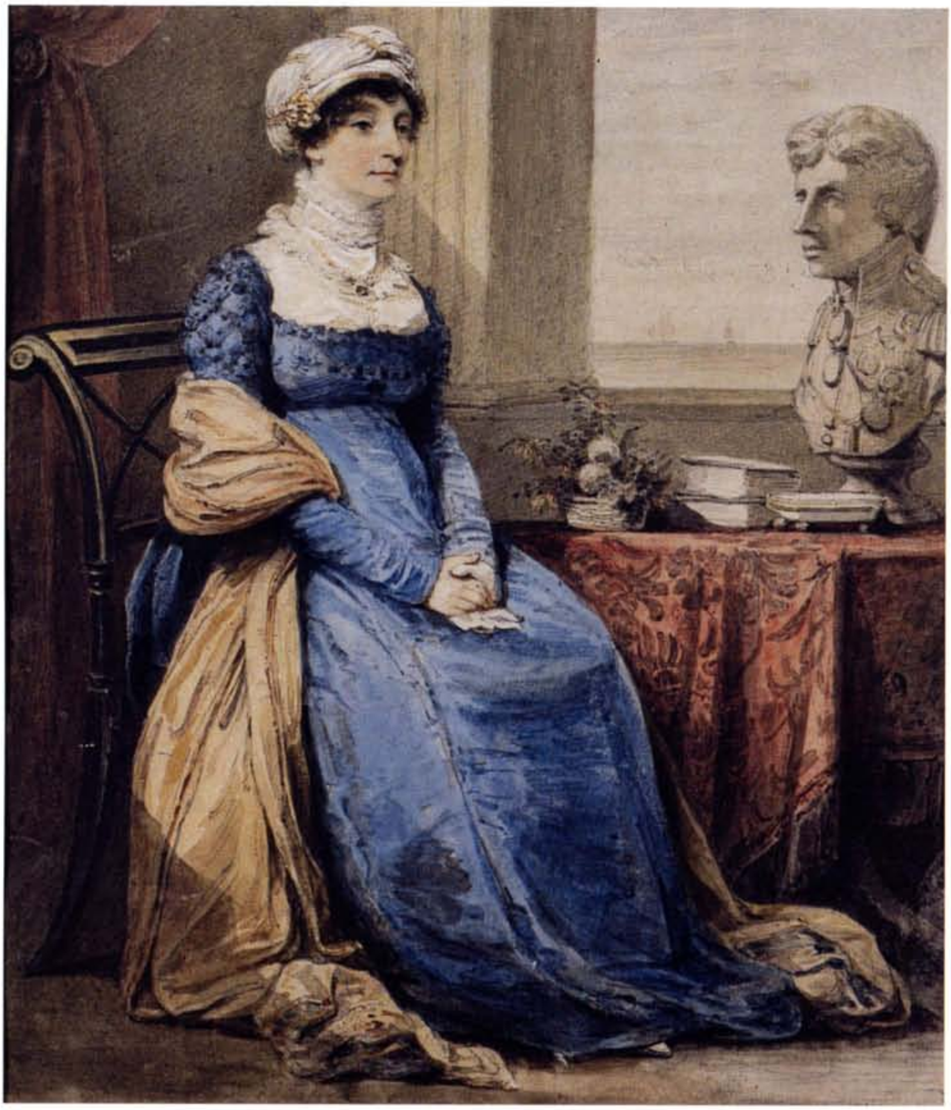
When Nelson made his headquarters at Naples in 1798, he met Emma Hamilton. Her early background had been sensational, a blacksmith's daughter, giddy but ravishingly beautiful, living by her body, pregnant by Sir Harry Fetherstonhaugh, cast out, taken in by Charles Greville, a new lover and protector who subsequently passed her on to his uncle Sir William Hamilton, British envoy at Naples, who made her his mistress and subsequently married her when he was 60 and she still under 24. By the time Nelson met her she was established as a celebrated European beauty, famed for her performance of classical 'attitudes', welcomed at the Neapolitan court, a favourite of the Queen and accepted by visiting British aristocracy. Nelson and Emma were brought together in the complex political circumstances of the Neapolitan court, Nelson using Emma as his translator and go-between with the determinedly pro-British and deeply anti-French Queen. Being so alike in personality, having the same energy, decisiveness and theatrical personalities, Nelson and Emma were wonderfully suited as working partners. She brought Nelson the total unconditional approval and attention he sought, and when they became lovers in late 1799 or early 1800 she awoke and intoxicated his senses. In Nelson she encountered a man who loved her for herself and was not simply using her, as had so many men in her past. Each accepted the other uncritically. Each became entirely necessary to the other, whatever may have been the spiteful comments of onlookers about her increasing size, their mutual adoring dependence, or her dramatic and vulgar behaviour.

Fanny had no hope of prevailing against this new alliance. Nelson began by naively behaving as though nothing needed to change, but the birth of his child, Emma's campaign against Fanny in the Nelson family and Nelson's inability to resist Emma's manipulations, led to Fanny's being ruled out of his life with utter insensitive ruthlessness, alleviated only by his financial generosity in giving her half his income and returning to her the capital she had brought with her on marriage. He was uncharacteristically cowardly, preferring to use Alexander Davison to convey messages to her rather than being open with her himself, no doubt trying to assuage his moral discomfort and guilt by being financially generous. Fanny always sought reconciliation and worked for it as far as she was able, but she and Nelson were an incompatible couple, their failing marriage finally destroyed by Nelson and Emma's overpowering mutual attraction. In the working out of this ordinary human drama, Nelson and Emma both displayed the worst and most unlikeable sides of their characters.

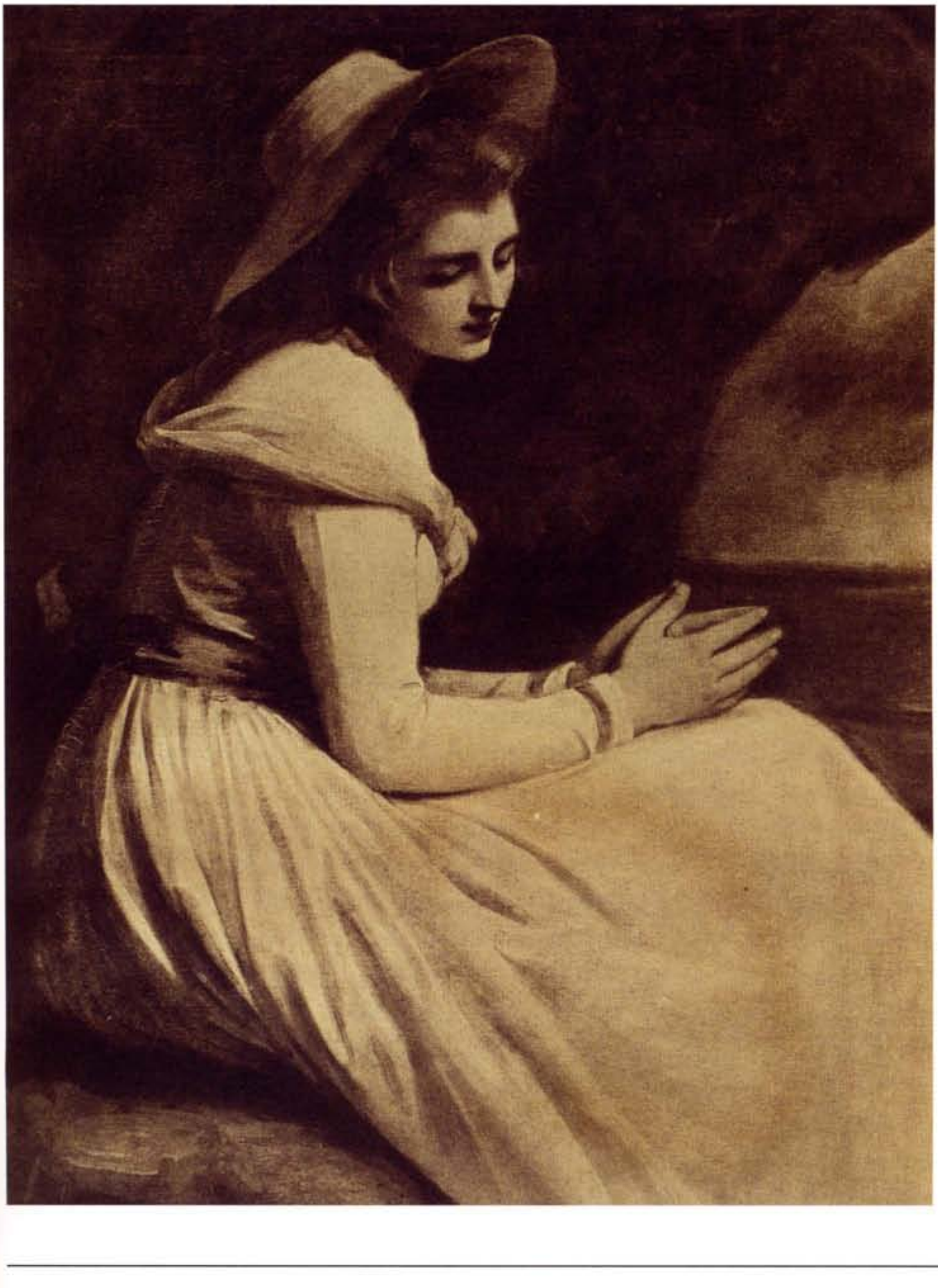
Nelson in 1805 by Catherine Andras. A waxwork still in Westminster Abbey. Emma said 'that it was impossible for anyone who had known him to doubt or mistake it.' (Westminster Abbey Historic Monuments)

A STAIN ON NELSON'S REPUTATION

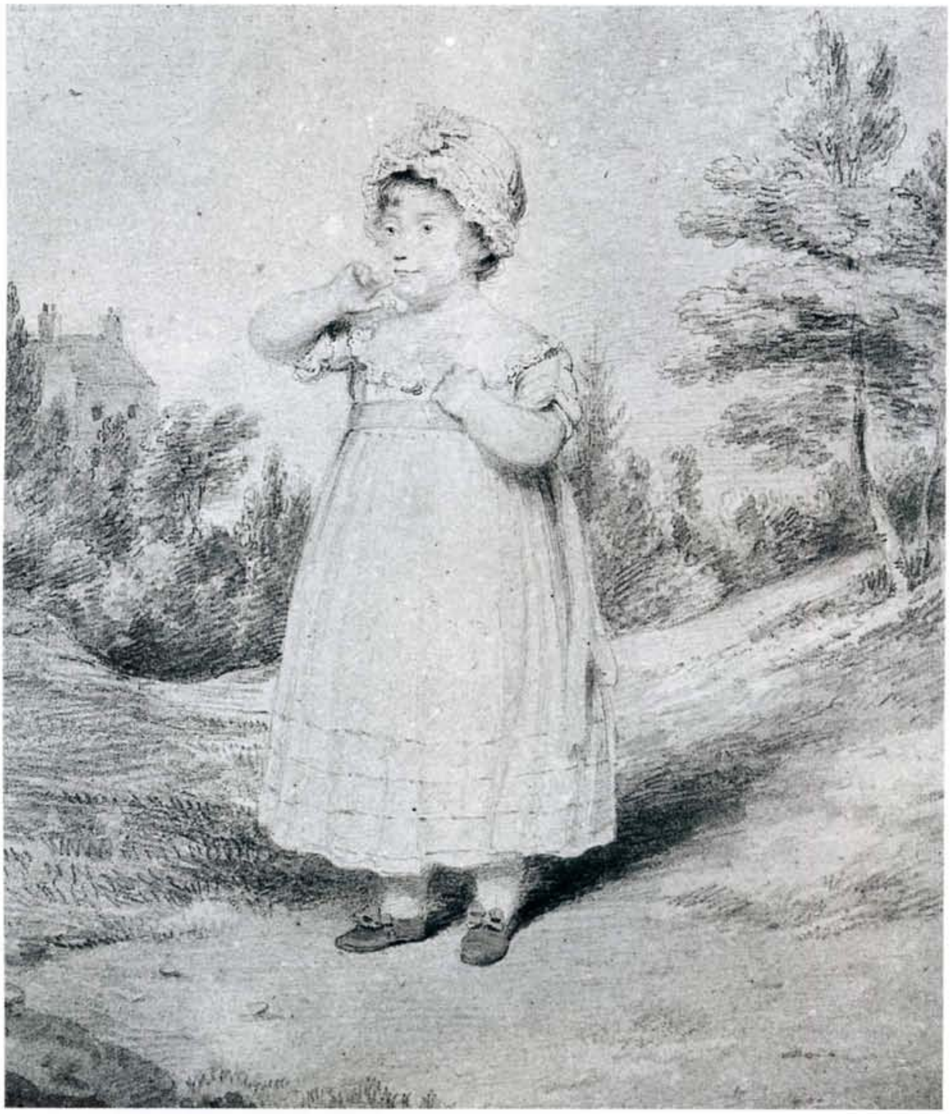
In February 1800 Charles James Fox, without actually naming Nelson, associated him by implication in the House of Commons with 'cruelties of every kind so abhorrent that the heart shudders at the recital.' He was referring to events during the restoration of the monarchy in Naples in 1799 when Nelson acted on behalf of King Ferdinand (an important British ally) at the overthrow of the French puppet Parthenopean Republic. It is alleged that Nelson lured collaborators and fellow travellers out of castles in which they had taken shelter and from which they had been granted safe conduct to France, before Nelson arrived on the scene. Two points are very clear. In treating with the 'rebels' Cardinal Ruffo, in command of the retaking of Naples, had totally disregarded orders from the king. Nelson, aware of these orders, never changed his position that surrender was the only option for those in the castles. Ruffo, realizing the



Nelson's wife Frances (Fanny) Nisbet (1761–1831), was a widow with a young child when Nelson met her in Nevis. Nelson may have married her on the rebound from his sentimental attachment to Mary Moutray wife of Antigua's dockyard commissioner and possibly because of her financial prospects. This turned out to be a marriage of opposite personalities, lacking the cement of passion, shared interests or children. (Royal Naval Museum) dangerous position he was in with the king and having sole control of communication with the castles, had an urgent motive for getting the people out and it is most likely that to achieve his objective he misrepresented Nelson's position. Nelson himself never communicated directly with the forts. In the event 162 (4 per cent) of those from the castles were executed by order of the king (not Nelson). Retribution for traitors or collaborators seems unfortunately to be a deep human instinct and it is entirely illusory to think that Nelson could have had any control over inevitable blood letting by Neapolitans in Naples, let alone have prevented it. The horrendous atrocities that took place and to which Fox referred were committed on actual or suspected French sympathizers by the



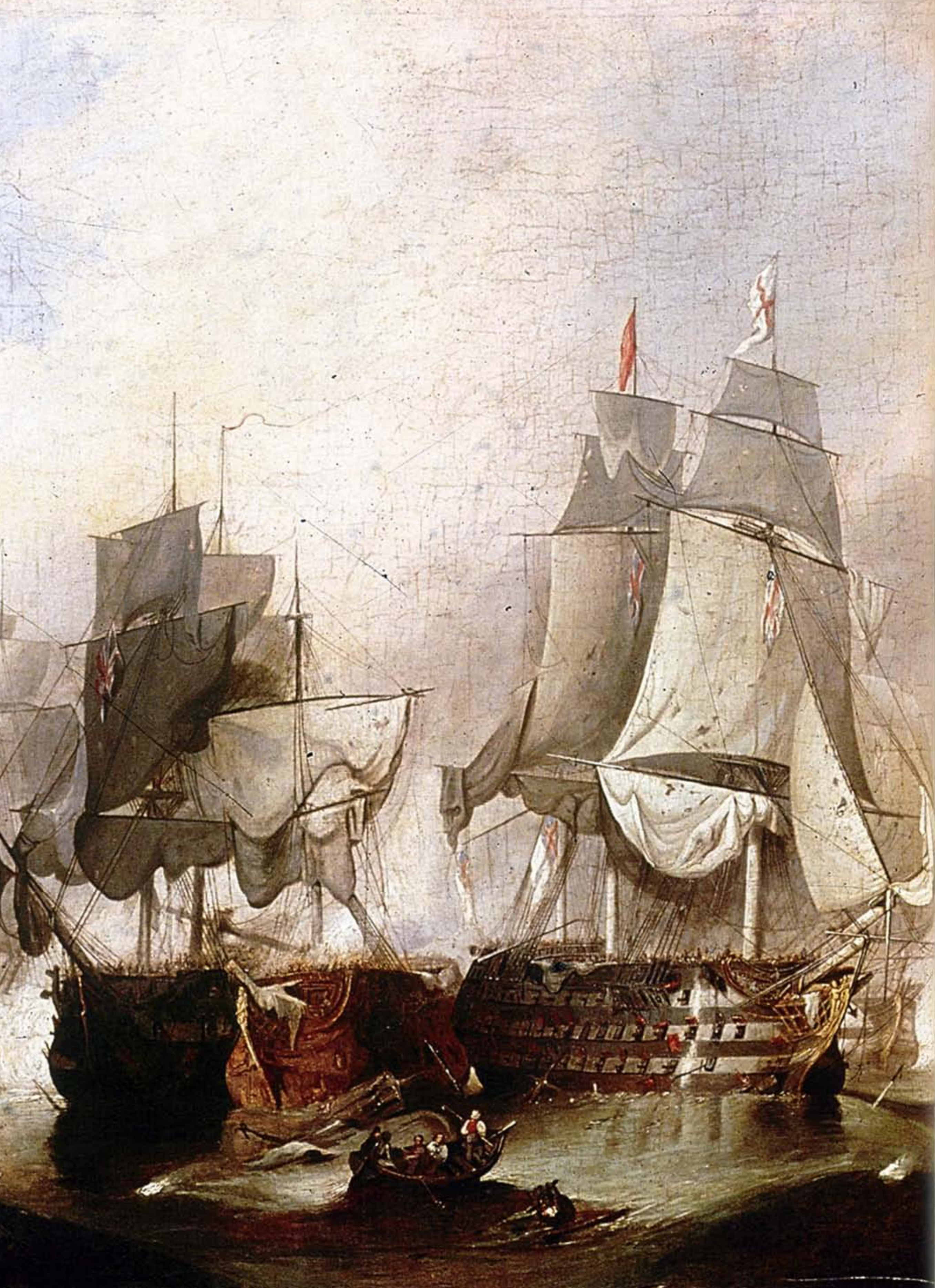
Nelson's mistress Emma Hamilton (1765–1815). Daughter of a blacksmith in Cheshire who died when she was an infant, she subsequently made her way in the world on the strength of her beauty, personality, body and her capacity to learn and adapt. At times larger than life she went to pieces after Nelson's death. She died in reduced circumstances in Calais in 1815. (Royal Naval Museum)



Nelson's daughter with Emma Hamilton. Probably conceived on board the *Foudroyant* in spring 1800 and born secretly in London in early 1801 as Nelson was on his way to the battle of Copenhagen. Nelson doted on her and hung this portrait in his cabin. (Royal Naval Museum)

Neapolitan mob, much as in later times thousands would be killed by their own countrymen in France and Italy after liberation in the Second World War.

Much has also been made of the execution of Admiral Carracciolo who without a shadow of doubt had fired on the ships he had formerly commanded. He was tried by a Neapolitan court martial composed of Neapolitan officers which sentenced him to death. Nelson's function as the king's representative was to sign the death warrant and order execution. He ordered that Carracciolo be instantly hanged from the yardarm of the Neapolitan ship *Minerve* and resisted pleas for more time for Carracciolo to prepare himself and for execution by firing squad. This has cast Nelson as merciless and so he was, but them ashore there was near anarchy, order had to be quickly re-established and the lazzaroni who had remained loyal to the king at terrible cost to themselves were baying for blood. Under such circumstances Nelson decided that the best justice would be swift.



EPITAPHS

Freud holds that every man dies in a way true to himself. Nelson died gently, submissively, without histrionics, full of thought for those he loved, reassured that he had done his duty and had not let down others or himself. His death was not a case of 'shot so quick so clean an ending'. It took him three-and-a-quarter painful hours to die and from the beginning he knew he was a dead man. To the end he managed himself in character.

About his death itself, Mary Renault's words on Alexander the Great seem most apposite: 'One cannot suppose that Alexander would have wished it otherwise. He loved his fame. Like Achilles he had traded length of days for it.' George III said much the same thing in less fine language when he said bluntly to Nelson's brother William: 'He died as he would have wished.'

Lord Minto who had known Nelson for ten years told his wife after his last visit to Merton, 'He is in many points a really great man, in others a baby.' Alexander Scott, his chaplain and private secretary who had lived on board with him during the final two years of his life and for whom Nelson was, 'best beloved and most interesting of human beings,' put the same idea rather differently: 'That man possessed the wisdom of the serpent with the innocence of the dove.' Over the years his great commander St Vincent changed his view from 'There is but one Nelson' to 'Animal courage was the sole merit of Lord Nelson, his private character most disgraceful in every sense of the word.' Collingwood, a friend and fellow officer of Nelson since their early West Indian days, a fellow captain at the battle of Cape St Vincent and Nelson's second-in-command at Trafalgar, his 'dear Coll', described their friendship as 'a brotherhood of more than 30 years' and in everything he ever said about Nelson, revealed no trace of personal or professional jealousy.

Nelson was a kaleidoscopic character, many faceted, impossible to reduce to a single dimension. Blessed neither with a great physical presence nor fine and handsome looks, Nelson's persuasive mental energy, his capacity for empathy, his way with words in both public and private, the incongruity of his slight figure and heroic deeds, together invested him with charisma. His way of exercising authority was seductive yet so convincing that he was perceived as different, and very appealing in the rigid hierarchic service in which he worked. In private life, apart from his celebrity and achievements, Nelson might or might not have interested or appealed to us individually. However, had we had been serving in one of his fleets, we can be almost certain that we would have been among the majority swept along by his magic.

CHAPTER THREE

NELSON THE COMMANDER

EDGAR VINCENT

LEADER, MANAGER AND BATTLE COMMANDER

Judged against the concepts of today's most respected analysts of leadership, or against criteria laid down for today's naval officers, Nelson was a supreme leader.

If the competencies he displayed in managing fleets (huge logistical, administrative and managerial tasks), are judged against those required by today's senior naval officers and top business managers we find that he bears the hallmarks of a superb manager.

If Nelson's performance as a battle commander, his tactical insights and his command behaviour are compared with today's Maritime Doctrine of Naval Command we discover that his was a philosophy of command in tune with today and far ahead of his own time.

Two centuries on, Nelson is used as an exemplary case of leadership for today's officers. There could hardly be a more enduring monument. He was a complete combination of leader, manager and battle commander. He was motivated, talented, energetic and 'different'.

NELSON'S SUCCESS IN BATTLE

Success in battle is the ultimate measuring rod of a commander. Nelson's has never been more succinctly presented than by words on the plinth of the Nelson monument erected by public subscription in 1808 in the Place Jacques Cartier in Montreal, Canada.

On its right face the plinth reads:

> On the 1st and 2nd of August 1798 Rear-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson KB with a British fleet of 12 sail of the line and a ship of 50 guns defeated in Aboukir Bay a French fleet of 19 sail of the line and 4 frigates under Admiral Brueys taking and destroying the

OPPOSITE
The Battle of Trafalgar. By George Chambers. Sandwiched between the three-decker *Victory* and Elias Harvey's 'fighting *Téméraire*' is the French *Redoutable* from whose tops sharpshooters fired on *Victory's* decks and mortally wounded Nelson. (National Maritime Museum)

> whole except 2 sail of the line and 2 frigates without the loss of one British ship.

On its rear the plinth reads:

> On the 2nd April 1801 a British fleet of 10 sail of the line and 2 ships of 50 guns under the immediate command of the Right Honourable Vice-Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson Duke of Bronte attacked the Danish line moored for the defence of Copenhagen consisting of 6 sail of the line and 11 large ship batteries besides boat and gun vessels supported by the ground and land batteries when after a severe contest of 4 hours the whole line of defence was sunken taken or destroyed without the loss of a British ship.

On its left face the plinth reads:

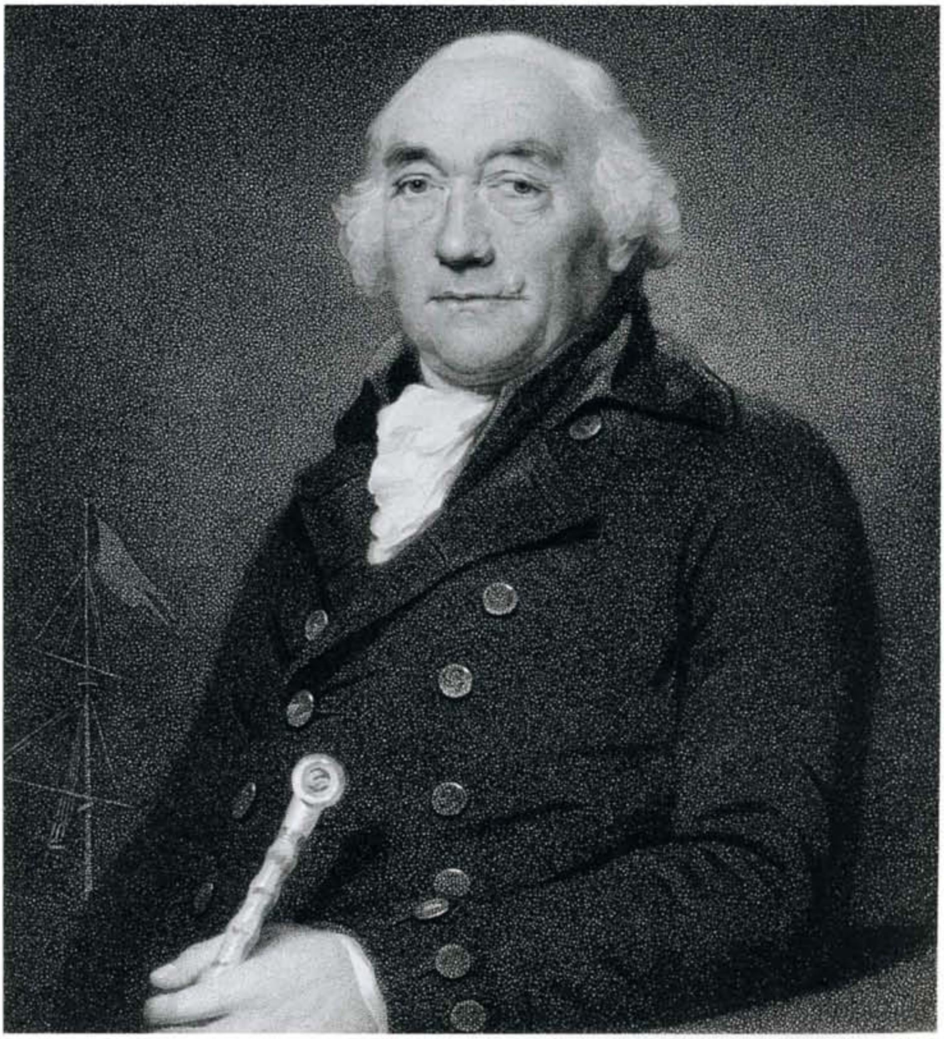
> On the 21st October 1805 the British fleet of 27 sail of the line commanded by the Right Honourable Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson Duke of Bronte attacked off Trafalgar the combined fleet of France and Spain of 33 sail of the line commanded by the Admirals Villeneuve and Gravina when the latter were defeated with the loss of 19 sail of the line captured and destroyed. In this memorable action his country has to lament the loss of her greatest naval hero but not a single ship.

This terse arithmetic conveys the magnitude of Nelson's success as Britain's greatest ever naval commander. It explains how he enthused a nation in the darkest hours of its struggle against Napoleon and inspired succeeding generations.

THE ROAD TO COMMAND AND NELSON'S DEPTH OF EXPERIENCE

It is often said that great leaders are born not made, but whatever Nelson's inborn leadership qualities there is no doubt about the breadth of his professional knowledge.

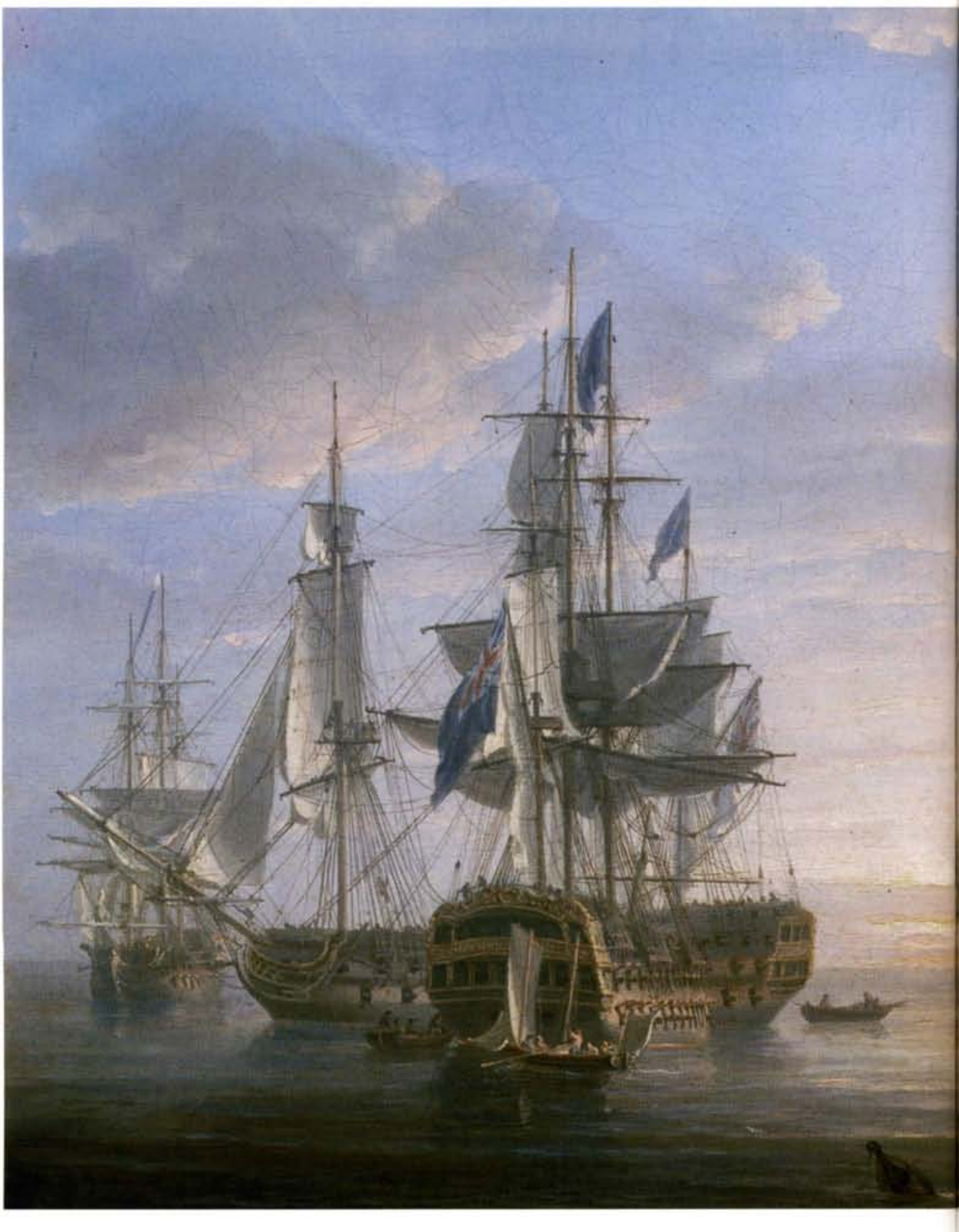
The complexities of commanding a ship in battle, maintaining its edge in long wearisome blockade duty, creating an environment in which 500–600 men could live tolerably well together in close proximity for months on end, required knowledge and experience as well as aptitude. Nelson's early experience was directed at passing for lieutenant, the first step in commissioned rank. This he did in April 1777 when he was 18. He produced journals kept by himself in the five ships in which he had served and certificates from their captains. In essence they certified 'he can splice, knot, reef a sail & etc., and is qualified to do the duty of an Able seaman and Midshipman.' He was then orally examined by three captains on what he would do in such and such situations. Thus before he could



Captain William Locker. Nelson's first captain as a newly commissioned lieutenant in the frigate *Lowestoffe*. An ideal mentor and sea daddy for a young officer. Nelson reminded him after the Nile that it was he 'who always told me Lay a Frenchman close and you will always beat him.' (Royal Naval Museum)

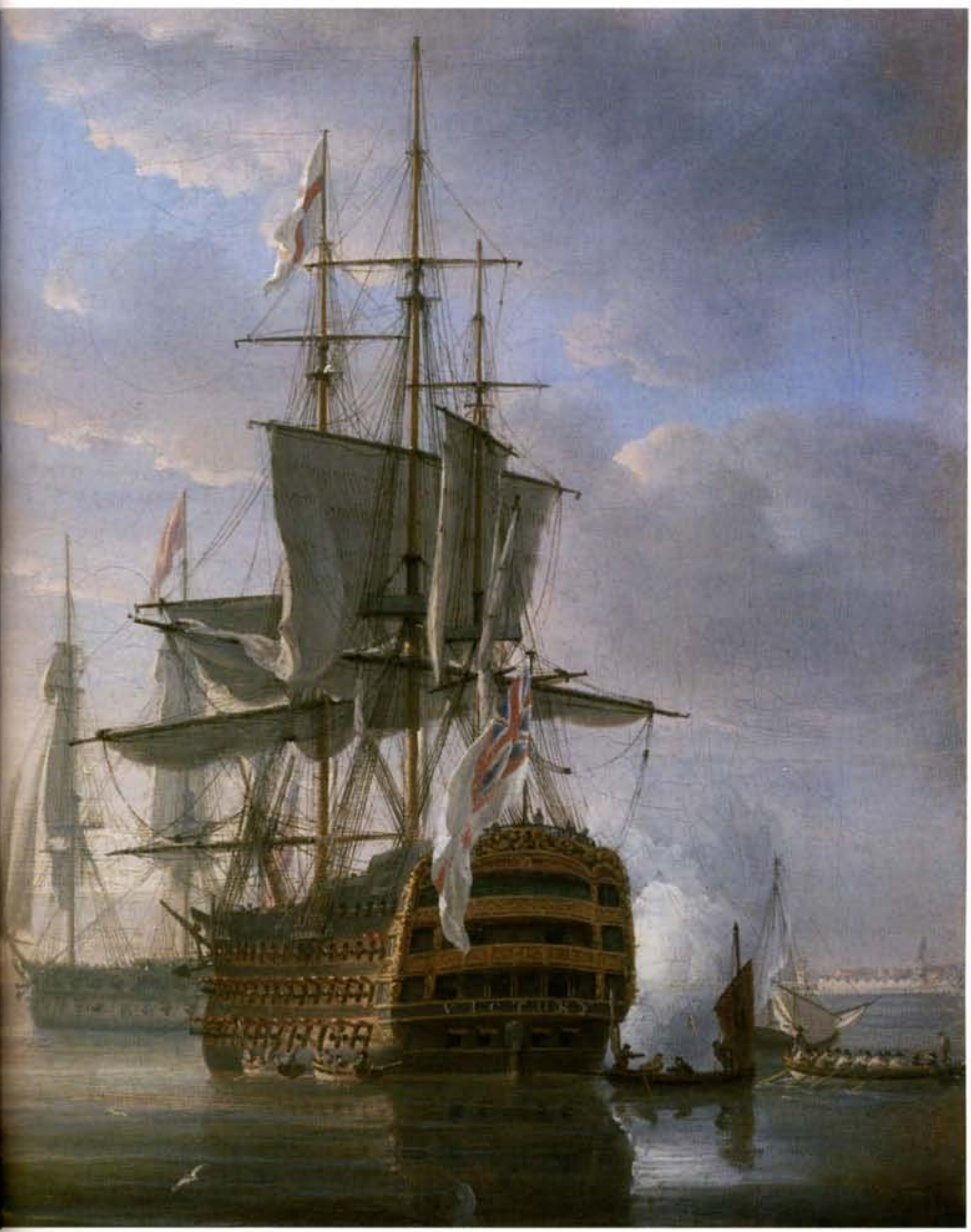
take his first steps along the road to command Nelson had to prove that he could do the job of the men under him and that he possessed the basic skills required of an officer. This requirement to demonstrate competence made the British Navy the first comprehensively professional service in Europe. This was in sharp relief to the Army where for years it would still be possible to purchase the right to command.

While still a midshipman Nelson extended his horizons from rural Norfolk to the Arctic Ocean, the North Atlantic, the Carribean, the South Atlantic, the Southern Ocean, the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf, thousands of miles of deep-sea sailing, six years' experience of men, of being commanded, of ships and weather. Then he worked his way through the officer ranks, third lieutenant of the frigate *Lowestoffe* sent to serve in the West Indies, first lieutenant in Sir Peter Parker's flagship, next Master & Commander of a smaller vessel, the *Badger*, his introduction to the demands and responsibilities of independent command. In 1779, three months before his 21st birthday, he was



Nelson's flagships. Right foreground *Victory* 100 guns, his Trafalgar flagship as vice-admiral of the white. Left foreground *Vanguard* 74 guns, his Nile flagship as rear admiral. Background from the left, *Agamemnon* 64 guns, his first post captain command during the Corsican and Italian-French riviera campaigns, *Elephant* 74 guns, his flagship at Copenhagen as vice-admiral, *Captain* 74 guns, which flew his commodore's broad red pendant at Cape St Vincent. An imaginary grouping by Nicholas Pocock painted in 1807. (National Maritime Museum)

'made', appointed post captain of a small frigate of 195 officers and men. It would be another 15 years before he was given command of a ship of the line, the 64-gun *Agamemnon* with a complement of 500 officers and men. Two years later, 36 years old and near the top of the captains list, Nelson took command of a small group of ships in operations off the Italian Riviera. Then came the battle of Cape St Vincent in 1797, and in the course of the next eight years he successively commanded three ships of the line and smaller ships in the attack on Tenerife, 13 ships at the Nile, 12 at Copenhagen and as Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean his fleet eventually increased to 35 ships of the line at Trafalgar.

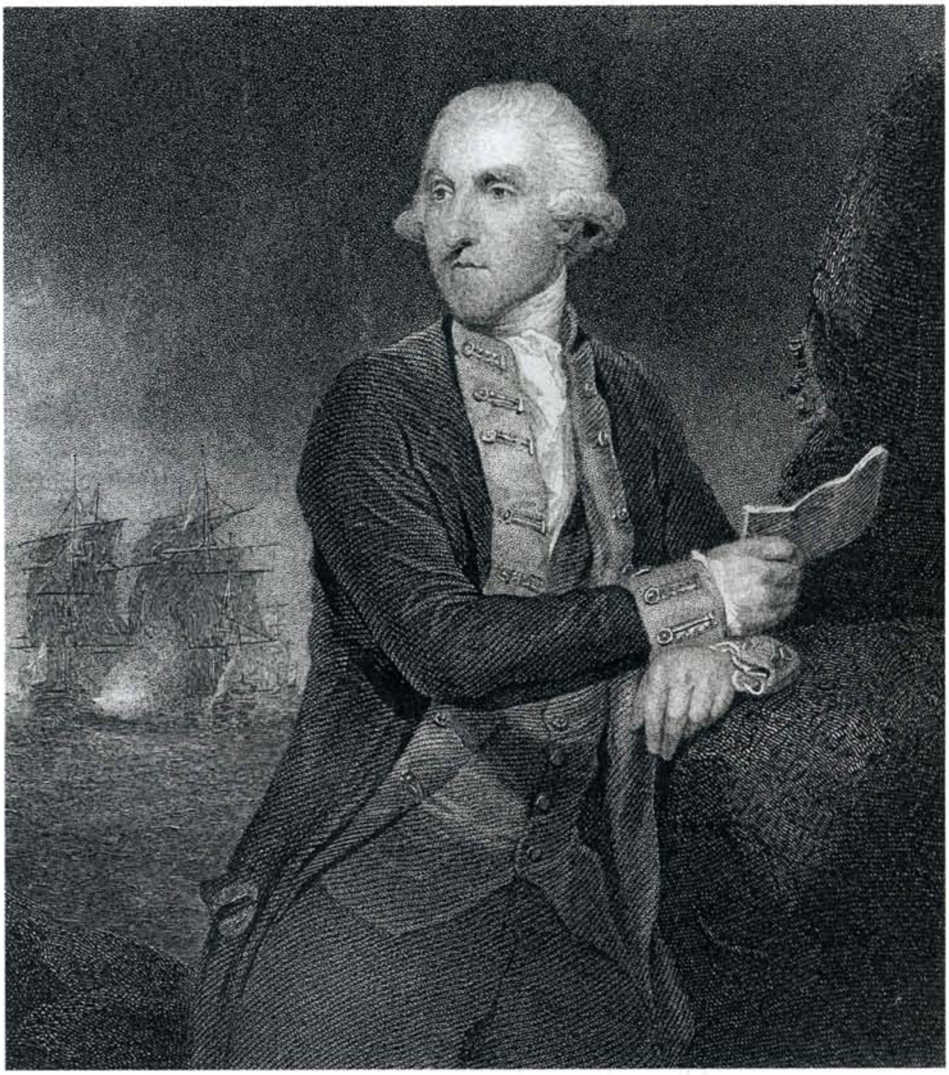


Each of these phases placed different demands on him. As a post captain he was totally responsible for everything to do with his ship. As a flag officer (Commodore, Rear-Admiral and finally Vice-Admiral), he had a captain responsible for discipline and running the ship. He himself was primarily responsible for matters affecting the fleet as a whole and for directing the movements of the squadron or fleet under his command to meet the military, political, diplomatic and commercial objectives of the Government.

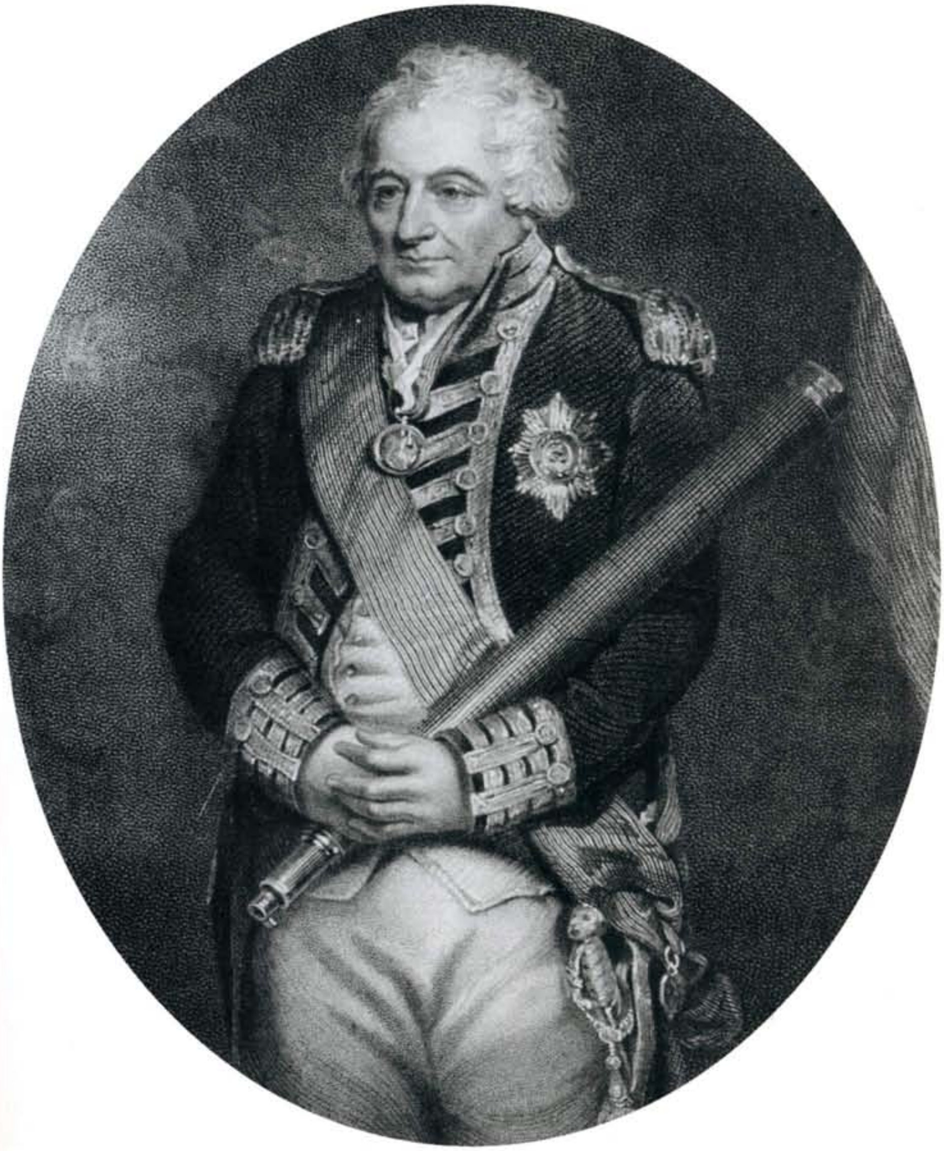
Nelson's apprenticeship was long, his accumulated experience deep. He was battle hardened, his exposure to battle unequalled by his contemporaries. At every level of command he displayed professional mastery, the *sine qua non* of the great commander.

PATRONS, MENTORS AND LUCK

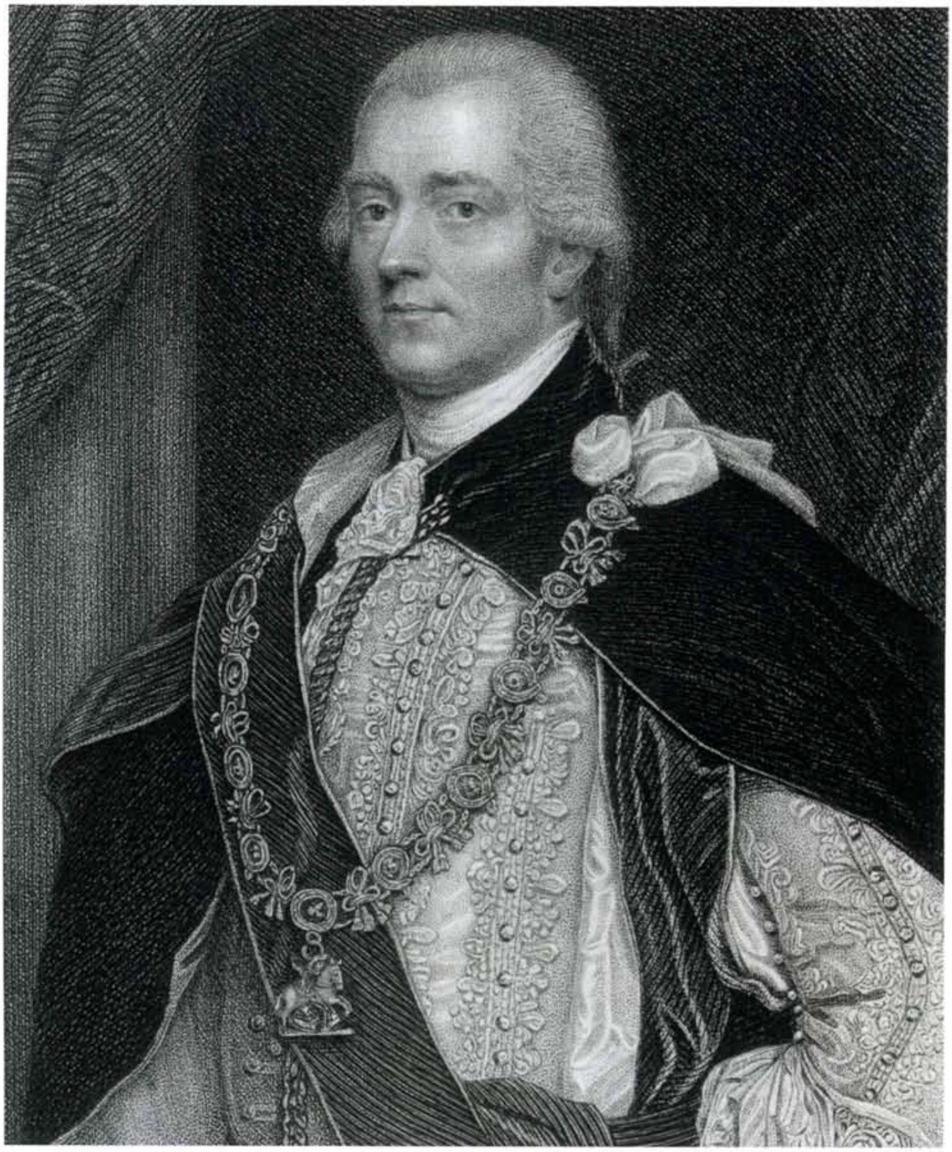
Nelson was fortunate in his patrons, mentors and the circumstances of his time. His uncle, Captain Maurice Suckling, took him to sea, enabled all his early experience and, on becoming Comptroller of the Navy, was an important factor in his career progression and relatively early promotion to post captain. Nelson was again fortunate in his first, worldly wise and experienced captain, William Locker and subsequently to work for three powerful and influential admirals, Sir Peter Parker, Lord Hood and Sir John Jervis, later Earl St Vincent. They all respected Nelson's professional zeal, liked him and encouraged him. He admired and learned much from them. He was particularly fortunate in serving under the very demanding Jervis who quickly identified one of Nelson's strongest points,



Admiral Lord Hood, Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean Fleet 1793–95. Greatly admired by Nelson who served under him at the sieges of Bastia and Calvi in the campaign to take Corsica. Nelson was very disappointed that Hood did not give him sufficient credit for his contribution. (Royal Naval Museum) the quality he most prized in a senior officer, capacity to bear the responsibility of command. Jervis quickly brought him to the attention of Lord Spencer, First Lord of Admiralty who was instrumental in choosing Nelson to take a squadron into the Mediterranean, a decision on which, in Spencer's words, the fate of Europe depended and which was to lead directly to the battle of the Nile. Spencer courageously dipped below more senior admirals and put his own political credibility at risk. Sir Gilbert Elliot, the former Viceroy of Corsica, had witnessed Nelson's impressive capacity to dominate people and events during the evacuation of Corsica. A spectator at the battle of Cape St Vincent, he had also seen Nelson's initiative and heroism and had made his views known to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Grenville. St Vincent selflessly equipped Nelson with a squadron of his finest ships. Thus Nelson earned the backing of powerful



Admiral Sir John Jervis, later Earl St Vincent, Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean Fleet 1759–99, First Lord of Admiralty 1801–1804. A disciplinarian who set new standards for officer performance and was chiefly responsible for making the Royal Navy such a formidable instrument. Nelson treated him as a father figure until their relationship later cooled. (Royal Naval Museum)

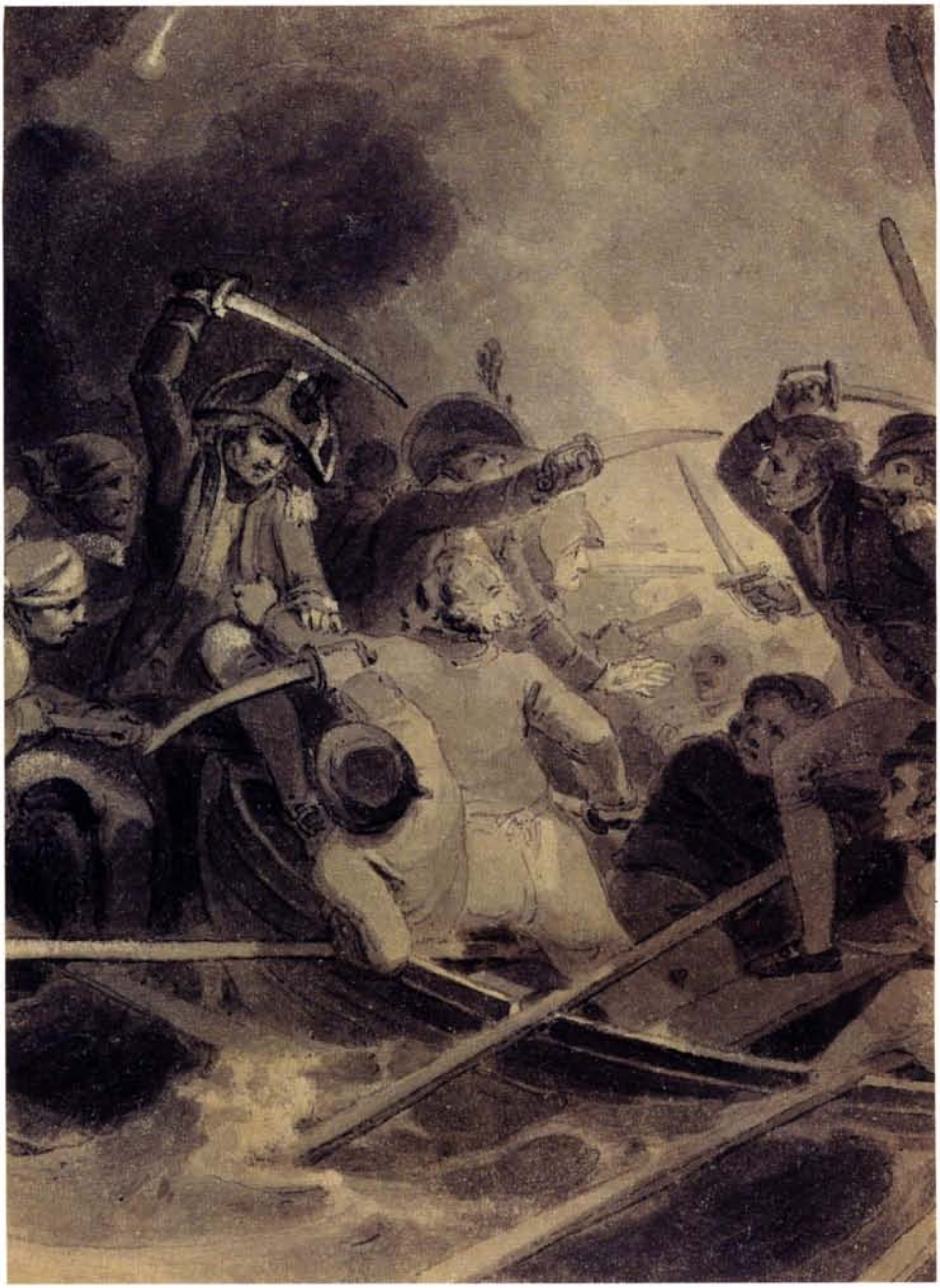


George Spencer, 2nd Earl Spencer, First Lord of Admiralty 1794–1801. He chose Nelson over the heads of more senior admirals to take a squadron into the Mediterranean in 1798 to find and destroy the French expedition which was carrying Bonaparte's army to Egypt. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

individuals who together provided him with the opportunity to establish his reputation. He was fortunate, too, in that continuous war from 1793 enabled him to be the right man in the right place at the right time, at St Vincent, the Nile, Copenhagen and Trafalgar. No other contemporary had such opportunities to distinguish himself.

LEADERSHIP ESSENTIALS

Courage was an absolute requirement of leadership. Officers had always to be alongside their men on the gun decks, on the exposed upper deck, or leading boarding parties. Nelson's personal courage, aggressive instincts, quick thinking and natural dominance made him the epitome of the leader. From his first charge at Spanish soldiers in an outpost of Fort San Juan in 1780 as a newly promoted



Nelson's boat action off Cadiz 4 July 1797. Nelson described this action as 'a hand-to-hand service with swords' and added 'It was during this period that perhaps my personal courage was more conspicuous than at any other part of my life.' A pen and wash drawing by William Bromley. (Royal Naval Museum)

post captain, Nelson displayed dash and courage and even as a commodore led his men over the side at the battle of Cape St Vincent (much to his wife's distress when she heard about it), to board the *San Nicolas*. During a subsequent bombardment of Cadiz when others were slow to respond to counterattack by Spanish gunboats, Nelson, now a Rear-Admiral, leaped into his barge and set his ten-man crew rowing furiously at the enemy. As has been said, 'His impulse to active leadership and his instinct to attack were phenomenal and while it was unwise of him to abandon all capacity to control the operation, it was a wonderfully inspiring sight to all those he needed to emulate him.' Paradoxically, failure at Tenerife in 1797 when he lost an arm and many of his men in a failed assault, confirmed his intrepid, aggressive, and some might say rash, leadership. It was not in his nature to be cautious or hesitating.

At the Nile Nelson's decision making was instantaneous, his mind processing all the key variables at lightning speed as he unhesitatingly sailed his fleet at the French line. At Copenhagen with ships aground and his battle plan virtually in tatters, he acted without pause or loss of confidence to reorganize his remaining ships.

Nelson's transcendent courage and aggression were such that men followed him. His brain power, self confidence, sheer mental energy, and persuasiveness gave him a natural dominance which caused others to turn to him. In the run up to Copenhagen these qualities were so effectively deployed that command, in effect, passed from Hyde Parker's irresolute hands into Nelson's.

MOTIVATION

Motivation is the fuel of achievement and success. Throughout his career Nelson was totally motivated. From his earliest days he was proactive, seeking new experiences and eagerly snatching at every opportunity that came his way. His professional enthusiasm impressed all he met and with it went professional optimism; everything was going to turn out well for him; his ships and crews were always the best; he never had doubts about winning. But he was also an organization man who instinctively worked with the grain of the Navy. He neither irritated nor alarmed the Admiralty with propositions for change and reform. Any differences between them were skilfully managed. He always knew when to give in gracefully and was unfailingly diplomatic. In fact he was never a maverick and his two great commanders-in-chiefs, Hood and St Vincent, both allowed and encouraged him to flower, cleverly realising that Nelson, self directed and capable of bearing any responsibility, could be managed on a very light rein and needed only encouragement. For them he was always an enthusiastic subordinate delivering without fail the results they wanted. But Nelson could be dismissive of admirals who were less commandingly professional, such as Hughes who did not have Nelson's sense of duty, Hotham who had not the same level of aggressive energy, Hyde Parker who tried to freeze him out of planning for Copenhagen and Keith who tried to treat him as a minion. On one famous occasion during his period at Naples, Nelson used his orders to protect Naples to disobey a direct order from Lord Keith to go to Minorca. He did this in a characteristically open way, keeping the Admiralty informed of his intention and rationale. For all that he believed in the importance of hierarchy and the necessity for obedience Nelson was not a yes man and always had the moral courage and self belief to deal openly with his political and naval masters, in this case to accept responsibility for making his own decision rather than taking the easy option of unthinking obedience.

For Nelson the Navy always came first, the cause was always great and it was to defeat the enemy.

ACHIEVING THE OBJECTIVE

As a post captain Nelson would know every man in his ship and excelled at creating a team out of his *Agamemnons* or his *Captains*. He remembered his Nile captains as 'a band of brothers.' But although he paid great attention to individuals and his team, he was always highly focused on meeting his objective.

Personal relationships were always a key part of his leadership. He was a great communicator and conciliator. When he suspected that his captain of the fleet Rear-Admiral Murray and Captain Keats of the *Superb* were at odds over the supply of hammocks, he wrote a private note to Keats, seeking to demonstrate that Murray, beset by demands from all ships, was not unfairly withholding supplies from him. Nelson had exerted himself personally to reinforce team spirit, had demonstrated quickness in picking up signals and shown unusual sensitivity in dealing with an apparently trivial inter-personal problem. It is not surprising that Nelson was an excellent diplomat and negotiator. He could assess the strength and weakness of his position, could deploy very forceful language but was always firm, clear and courteous, as in his negotiations with the Dey of Algiers, or at Copenhagen where detailed accounts of his negotiations with the Crown Prince of Denmark demonstrate the instincts of a born negotiator. And he seems to have been almost alone at the time in being able to collaborate with the Army in combined operations in which he was preeminently successful in the Corsican campaign and in the British retreat from the Mediterranean in 1797.

As Commander-in-Chief, he could not directly lead the thousands of men in his fleet. However much he walked the deck of his flagship, he could not get to know all his people intimately and so his symbolic acts became of the greatest importance. Nelson placed great emphasis on food and health and made these his managerial priorities and, not surprisingly, his captains felt encouraged to make them theirs too. Nelson knew that food was everything to sailors, the greatest single foundation of their health, happiness and morale. Evidence of his preoccupation with the quality as well as quantity of his men's food is everywhere. He showed infinite concern for health, especially care of the wounded. He was proud to say that the sick bays of his fleet were empty; he summed up his credo in the words, 'The great thing in all military service is health ... it is easier for an officer to keep men healthy, than the Physician to cure them.' Nelson was also concerned to transmit his values. In his fleet orders on desertion and in his personal actions in remitting sentences, he was hoping that his men would respond to his evident wish to be fair and merciful. He knew that a policy of warnings, of judging cases on their merits, of accepting pleas in mitigation on grounds of previous good conduct, would make severe punishment acceptable should the need for it arise. If men performed well they were forgiven. If officers blotted their copybook he was inclined to be merciful and give a second chance.

Nelson lived his values and modelled the behaviour he wished to see in his officers. Above all he kept his fingers on the pulse and mood of the fleet by attention to detail, endless communication and absorption of vast amounts of data. Together they ensured that he was a formidable but approachable and benign presence to his captains.

Yet Nelson was a hard-driving, demanding leader, always knowing exactly what he wanted, punctillious in things he regarded as important. He never complained about the harshness of the navy's discipline, nor sought to change it but tried in practice to find a balance between humanity, fairness and punishment to fit the crime. Brutality was endemic in Georgian society and was institutionalized in the Navy. Men accepted punishment as a fact of life, provided it was seen as fair and not sadistic. Behaviour that endangered the safety of the ship and the lives of others, or undermined discipline, had to be deterred. In *Agamemnon,* a happy and effective ship, men were flogged at a rate of two to three a month. Short sharp shocks of a few lashes were frequently administered and the logs of Nelson's early ships show that such men did not offend again, while heavier punishments were reserved for more serious crimes.

Nelson understood perfectly that a ship could not be managed effectively unless its captain and officers recognized the needs of their people for self respect, fairness and justice. To this end he tried to have around him officers who, if not gentlemen by birth, were gentlemen by nature, and knew how to behave in an acceptable way towards their fellow officers and men. This is what Nelson had in mind when he said, 'you must be a seaman to be an officer and also you cannot be a good officer without being a gentleman.'

INSPIRING AND ENTHUSING OTHERS

Commanders gain respect from their officers because they can do the business. Nelson additionally inspired affection for how he did things and became a model others wished to emulate. Riou, who commanded Nelson's frigates at Copenhagen, was completely won over and his last words, as he fatally obeyed Parker's signal to discontinue the action, were 'What will Nelson think of us?' Admiral Hoste, a great favourite of Nelson as a midshipman, flew a signal 'Remember Nelson' at the battle of Lissa. Blackwood, who commanded Nelson's frigates at Trafalgar became devoted to him, 'so kind, so good, so obliging a friend as never was.' Admiral Graves, who fought alongside him at Copenhagen referred to him as 'our gallant and enterprising little hero of the Nile.' Duff, captain of *Mars*, destined to die at Trafalgar, wrote to his wife, 'He is so good and pleasant a man, that we all wish to do what he likes, without any kind of orders.' In his ordinary transactions with subordinate officers Nelson always seemed to be confiding in them, trusting them. He very evidently made Blackwood feel how much really depended on him. He made individuals feel special and the centre of his attention. He had the knack of taking people into his confidence.

But it would be wrong to believe that everybody took to Nelson and his ways. Saumarez and Thompson were irritated by his self confidence and in their eyes, patronising behaviour, and there was a fellow captain who said to Nelson, 'You did just as you pleased in Lord Hood's time, the same in Admiral Hotham's and now again with Sir John Jervis. It makes no difference to you who is Commander-in Chief' – a not entirely admiring remark.

NELSON WAS DIFFERENT

Great leaders are often singular, stand out in a crowd and strike people as 'different'. The early Nelson had a kind of eccentric singularity of dress and appearance which Prince William remarked on in 1782, 'the old fashioned flaps of his waistcoat added to the general quaintness of his figure, and produced an appearence which particularly attracted my attention.' Nelson liked to deck himself out in his sash of the Order of the Bath, his gold medals and foreign decorations. Whether or not others approved is beside the point; his appearance made him memorable. His words could be equally singular. Churchill had his 'Never in the path of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few.' Nelson had 'England expects that every man will do his duty.' His gestures could be singularly theatrical and striking. He was given to putting his life on the line with expressions like, 'Westminster Abbey or glorious victory.' His reaction to Hyde Parker's potentially disastrous signal to break off the action at Copenhagen, 'I see no signal,' or his inspired truce message to the Danes, 'To the brothers of Englishmen the Danes...'; his reaction to the possibility of Hardy's being captured by the chasing French as his boat was being carried rapidly by the current towards the approaching enemy while attempting to rescue a seaman, 'By God I'll not lose Hardy; back the mizzen topsail'; his reaction to concerns about him as he was rowed for several hours in an open boat without an overcoat to join Hyde Parker's flagship in Kioge Bay, 'I have my duty to keep me warm.' It was always a case of the right gesture, or the right word, at the right time. He had the capacity to coin words that entered history. No wonder the little hero became increasingly larger in the hearts and minds of those who had to fight with him.

UNFAILING SUPPORT FOR HIS PEOPLE

All his life Nelson had a genius for self presentation. He was absolutely focused on getting the credit he felt due to him and resented being short-changed. As a very ambitious man he had also grasped that achievement is not its own reward but needs to be known about. However, it is safe to say that what mattered most to those who fought alongside him was that he never withheld credit from them, never took their credit and was assiduous in getting them rewards for their pains, an endearing and motivating characteristic. Reporting the capture by one of his ships of the *Guillaume Tell,* he wrote to Lord Spencer, 'I am sure your Lordship will not be sparing of promotion to the deserving. My friends wished me to be present. I have no such wish ... not for all the world would I rob any man of a sprig of laurel – much less my children of the *Foudroyant*.' Patronage and interest (capacity to ask for and grant favours) were an inescapable part of 18th-century life. Nelson did not abuse his patronage but exercised it to help many who were in no position to do him favours in return. He gave priority to sons of officers killed in action who he regarded as legacies to the Service, relatives of those who had helped him up the tree, and his own highly thought of young officers who he would push forward on their merits. He fought to get equal recognition for Troubridge following his misfortune in running aground at the Nile. He interceded with the First Lord of Admiralty on behalf of one of his bright stars, Layman, a young master and commander who had been court martialled for losing his ship. He put Gore, one of his most trusted frigate captains, in the way of prize money. Then there were older officers in unglamorous but essential shore jobs who were doing sterling work and merited his commendation and helping hand. And it was not just commissioned officers he supported. He went out of his way to commend the performance of Joseph King his boatswain in the *Boreas*, and Mr Morrisson the carpenter of the *Alexander* who played a major part in refitting *Vanguard* after she was almost wrecked in a storm. Like St Vincent he was interested in rewarding quality and merit. Like all commanders he liked to have tried and trusted men about him. All those who hitched themselves to his star wanted to feel that he would do his best for them; he unfailingly did, earning their gratitude and intensifying their motivation.

ATTITUDES AND PRINCIPLES AS A BATTLE COMMANDER

Nelson's single-minded aim was to find and beat the enemy and he allowed nothing to distract him. The importance of this cannot be overestimated. He had a particular horror of unfinished business. After Hotham's indecisive action of 1795 and his unwillingness to pursue the enemy, Nelson's reaction was, 'Had we taken ten sail and allowed the eleventh to escape when it had been possible to have got at her, I could never had called it well done,' – as Hotham had. In the aftermath of the Nile he was regretful that two surviving French ships had managed to escape. Even as he lay dying he was dissatisfied with the scale of his Trafalgar victory.

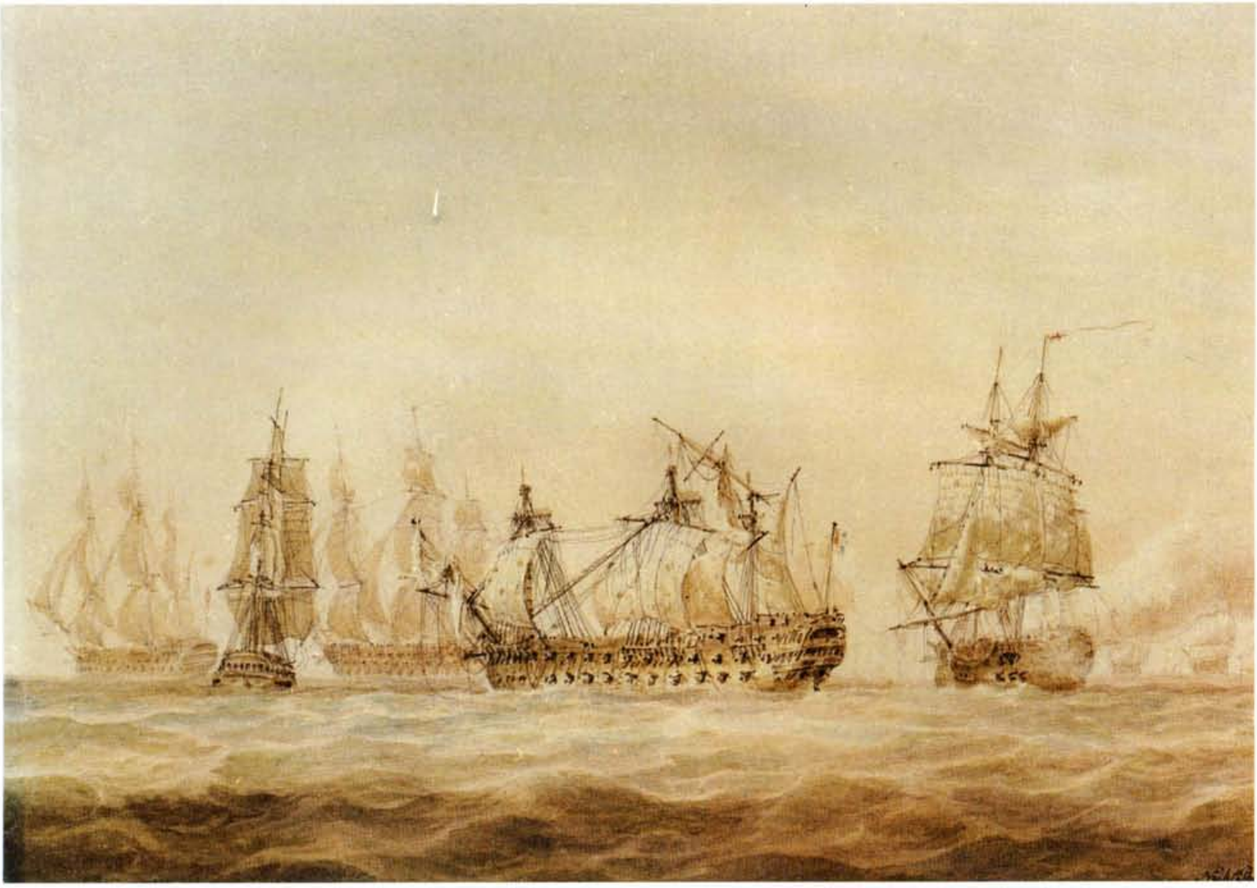
His fundamental principles were simple. He was convinced that one Englishman was worth three Frenchmen and that the way to beat a Frenchman was to get alongside him, hence his drive for close action. He understood that time and speed were always of the essence. He preferred a headlong and immediate attack, seizing the initiative, giving his own force the psychological upper hand. He would seek to concentrate force on one or two parts of his enemy, deliver a knock-out blow and then deal with the rest. Because he understood that chance and uncertainty were the two most important elements in war, Nelson seems to have spent little time pondering on what might happen or what might go wrong, hence his emphasis on speed of decision, speed of action and tactical simplicity. Nelson always had the knack of increasing his own chances, making his own luck and multiplying the enemy's uncertainties.

TACTICAL GENIUS

Nelson's tactical genius cannot be summed up in a technical way, for example that he broke the enemy's line in one or even two places. Howe had broken the line at The Glorious First of June in 1794, Jervis broke the line at the battle of Cape St Vincent in Nelson's presence in 1797 and Duncan broke the Dutch line in two places at Camperdown later in 1797. Howe had also ordered all his ships to break the line in order to foment a mêlée because that favoured British gunnery and seamanship. His officers were 'at liberty to act as circumstances require,' but did not reap the full reward because his captains had not understood so clearly what he was driving at.

Nelson genius was to implant his principles of battle in his captains' minds and to be adaptable. He would have fully appreciated the words of today's military doctrine: 'commanders who are in each others minds and who share a common approach to the conduct of operations are more likely to act in concert.' Nelson's realization that this was the key to commanding fleet operations might well have crystallized at the battle of Cape St Vincent in 1797. Admiral Jervis was conducting the action by signal. Nelson read the action as it unfolded and Admiral Jervis's signals in a way none of the others did. He alone used his initiative and wore out of the line, directly to attack the enemy. The others felt obliged to wait until told what to do. At the Nile his instinctive reading of the enemy's disposition and vulnerabilities produced a brilliant and rapid concentration of force on the French van and centre and presented a subsequent opportunity to roll up the rest of the French line. But Foley's initiative in going round to the other side of the French line, and the skill and discipline of four following captains, compounded Nelson's master stroke and brought an astounding team victory. Nelson seems to have intended Copenhagen to follow somewhat the Nile pattern, in other words, crush one segment of the fixed Danish line and move the concentration of force up the line to dispose of the rest, but misfortune struck. Ships went aground and he had to extemporize in placing his remaining ships. This time there was no scope for captains to exercise initiative. It had to be a hard slogging match between stationary sides, lined up facing each other at short range. It was a battle exemplifying above all Nelson's resolution and judgement as a fighting commander, keeping his nerve, pressing on with his attack while behind him his commander-in-chief wavered. At Trafalgar Nelson had again to extemporize. His plan for a third, fast-sailing, reserve squadron, had to be abandoned and he was at first unable to locate Villeneuve's flagship, the point of aim for his own line.

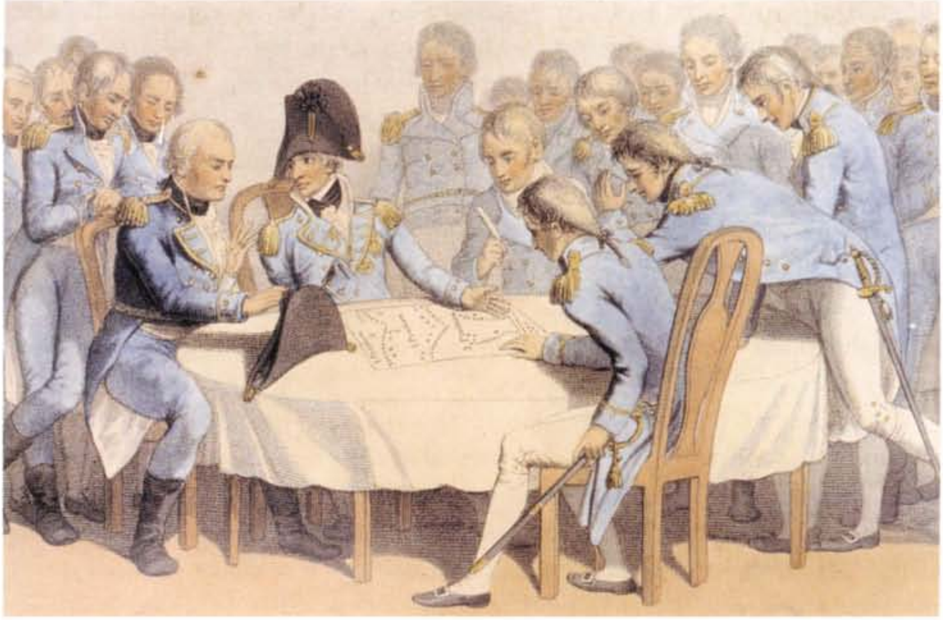
What was so striking about each of his victories was not only his capacity to adapt to circumstances but the huge risks he habitually ran, attacking a French fleet in Aboukir bay with night about to fall, attacking a resolute Danish defence line, sandwiched between shallow water and the Danish guns with no room to manoeuvre and no escape if the wind turned against him, and Trafalgar where his chosen mode of attack would expose his ships to a long, slow approach during which time his enemy could rake him but he could not reply. These were risks that probably no other admiral of his generation would have taken, but they paid off and Nelson's boldness provided unanswerable problems for his opponents.



The capture of the *Ca Ira* by the *Agamemnon*. A picture painted at the scene by Nicholas Pocock in 1795 when Nelson, serving under Admiral Hotham, was disappointed by Hotham's unwillingness to pursue the enemy fleet after the *Ca Ira* and *Censeur* had been captured. (National Maritime Museum)

CLARITY OF COMMUNICATION

In the run up-to the Nile, Nelson began to develop a process for face-to-face communication of the principles on which he would fight. Whatever the conditions of the day, minds would be prepared; there would be no scope for inertia or indecision. The Nile result was an unhesitating and wonderful team effort. At Copenhagen his broad method was the same. His journal entry for 26 March 1801 says, 'All day employed in arguing and convincing to [sic] the different officers the mode of attack.' Freemantle records how he succeeded. 'Lord Nelson is quite sanguine, but as you may well imagine there is a great diversity of opinion. In the mode of attack intended to be adopted and which is planned by Lord Nelson there is but one.' It was never a process of 'what do you think we should do?' or of group decision making, or of reaching consensus. It was always Nelson's plan, which stood or fell by his powers of communication, persuasion and inspiration. By the time of Trafalgar all this had become very clear, 'I laid before them the Plan I had previously arranged for attacking the enemy; and it was not only my pleasure to find it generally approved but clearly perceived and understood.' His delegation of complete control of one of his columns to Collingwood was within the context of his plan, not a modification of it and by no means an abdication of responsibility but a realistic judgement



Nelson explaining the Plan of Attack before the Battle of Trafalgar. Nelson made sure that his captains knew what he intended and what was expected of them. In this he was a precursor of today's military doctrine of Mission Command. An engraving by W. A. M. Craig, published by Edward Orme on the day of Nelson's funeral, 9 January 1806. (Royal Naval Museum)

that there needed to be a focus for leadership relatively close at hand in each of his two columns of attack. The level of confident trust and prominence thereby conferred on Collingwood evidently inspired him and others. A further master stroke was to direct any ship in doubt to get alongside an enemy. He defined what he wanted to happen, not in abstract terms such as 'use your initiative', but unambiguously: 'No captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of an enemy.' Nelson wanted all his ships to fight. Battle had to be swiftly set up and swiftly taken to close quarters and resolutely fought to a conclusion.

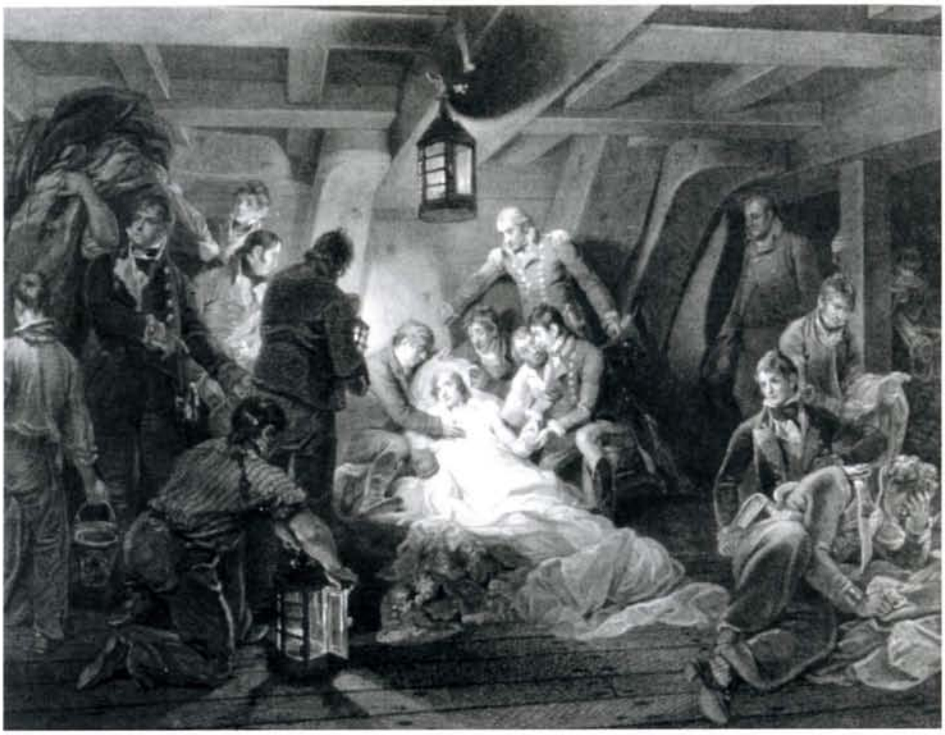
Once his opening gambit had been made they would not need to look to him for guidance. Nelson was anticipating Mission Command, the idea that a commander conveys what he intends, and what he expects of those under him, to the extent that all share in their commander's mind and are empowered to deal with the contingencies of battle without losing their sense of the plot. The supreme test of Mission Command is what happens if the commander is disabled or killed. At the Nile, Nelson was on deck for only an hour and a half in a battle that lasted till midday the following day and at Trafalgar for less than an hour. They were the two greatest naval victories in British history.

THE ESSENTIAL SPARK OF LEADERSHIP

Nelson's victories have been ascribed to many causes. The underlying confidence, commercial power and constitutional coherence of England, although not the cause of victory, was an underlying foundation. Other more direct causes included superior gunnery and the technological edge of better quality powder, use of carronades or 'smashers', and flintlock firing; better seamanship, the fact that a British crew could tack in five as opposed to 15 minutes and were sea-hardened, used to being at sea as opposed to being blockaded in harbours;

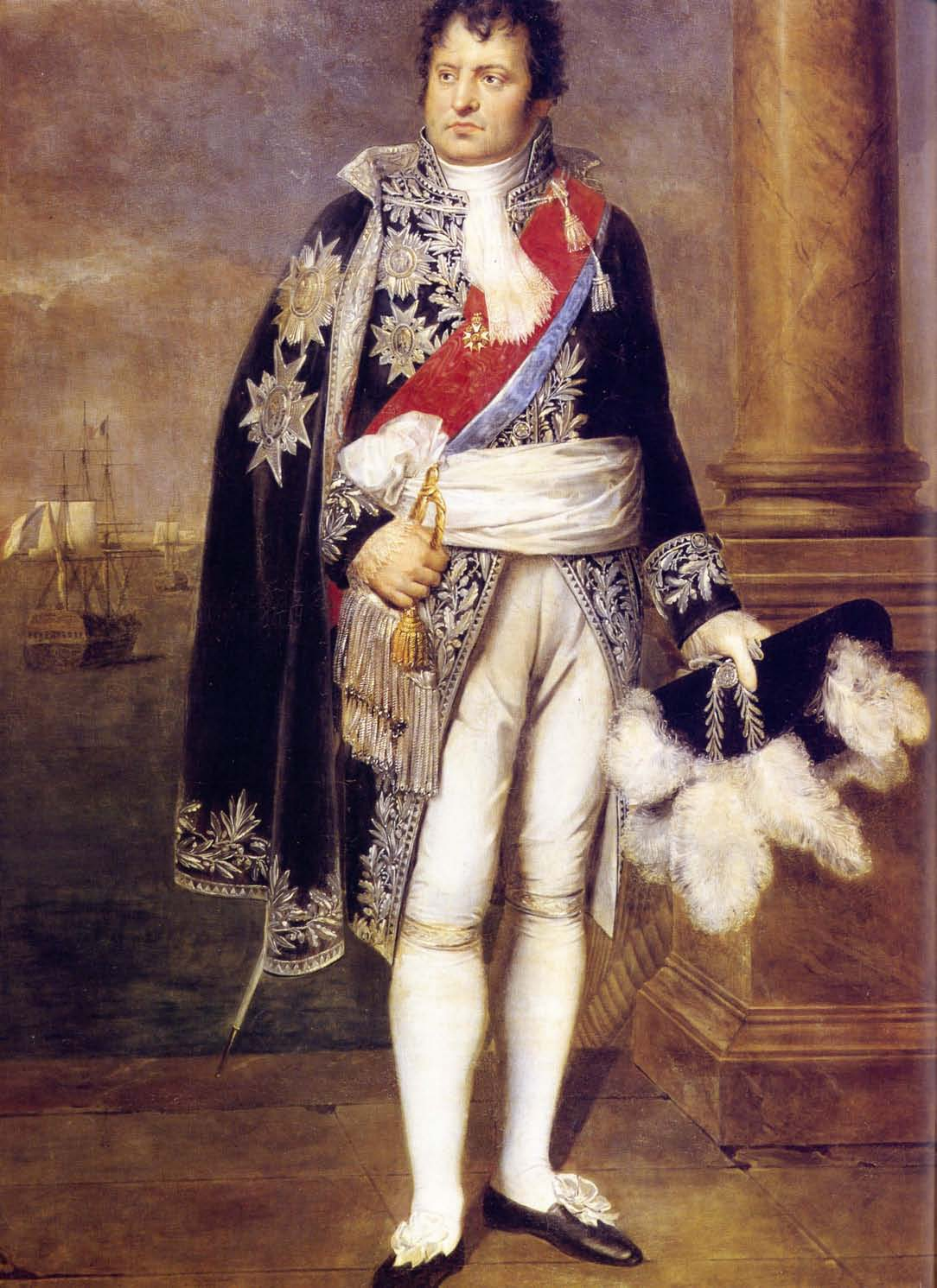
the character and morale of British sailors, comparatively better trained, better fed, fitter and better led, roused by the threat of invasion, compared with the politically purged and frequently alienated French officer cadre, and weaknesses in naval organization and practice in terms of health, food and pay in both the French and Spanish navies; the weakness of Franco-Spanish combinations, generally uneasy alliances, fraught with the endemic problems of coalitions; and finally Napoleon's centralist belief in controlling everything but in fact understanding nothing of the realities of marine warfare. There is some truth in all these contentions which, taken together, prompt the notion that Britain's professional navy, with its culture of competence, was an instrument at the peak of its powers and virtually irresistible.

But it has to be said that none of this actually guaranteed success. For example, in early 1799 the French fleet under Bruix escaped the blockade at Brest, entered the Mediterranean where the Commander-in-Chief was Lord St Vincent at Minorca and his second-in-command Vice-Admiral Lord Keith off Cadiz. The enemy evaded Keith, the Spaniards got out of Cadiz and linked with the French to create a combined fleet of more than 40 ships which eventually some months later escaped again, this time from the Mediterranean and was followed by Keith back to Brest The inability of either St Vincent, or Keith, who twice had the enemy in his sights, to initiate offensive action against Bruix tells its own story. Later in 1805, Admiral Calder encountered off Ferrol the combined fleet Nelson was then chasing from the West Indies, Calder's 15 ships against their 24. No greater contrast with Nelson could have been found. Calder,



The death of Nelson. A painting by A.W. Devis done in 1805 from sketches made on board *Victory*. Those present on the day are authentically represented. Captain Hardy (centre right), may have been caught just before or after he bent in response to Nelson's 'Kiss me Hardy.' (Royal Naval Museum) inhibited by superior opposing numbers and cautious in spirit, settled for an abortive action for which he was subsequently reprimanded by a court of inquiry.

The fact that St Vincent, Keith and Calder could have made more of their opportunities with the same instruments and men under their command underlines that Nelson's genius as a commander was the vital spark enabling the British fleet to reach its full potential.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE FRENCH AND SPANISH PERSPECTIVE

ADMIRAL RÉMI MONAQUE

For a Frenchman, the word Trafalgar has a muted and sinister resonance and re-opens wounds that time has not entirely healed. The French still say nowadays, when speaking of an unjust, unforeseen and disastrous event, '*C'est un coup de Trafalgar*' ('It's a Trafalgar-like blow'). Also, it was not without apprehension that in the run-up to the 200th anniversary I began research on the battle that put an end to a naval rivalry which had lasted more than 100 years between France and Great Britain.[1] I take this step with the hope of making a modest contribution to a renewed history, where national prejudices fade to make way for a better understanding of the points of view of these old adversaries. Europe is on the move and it needs to build a common history for itself, capable of being equally adhered to in London, Paris and Madrid.

In the lines that follow, which have been written particularly for a British reader, my aim is to stress those points that have appeared to me to be little known or badly interpreted by English authors. I will also try to shed light on the main differences in the composition, organization, operation and mentalities of the three naval forces concerned. At the request of the editor of this work, I will take into account the point of view of our Spanish ally, which is, as you will see, extremely different from our own, and I hope to be as objective as possible in presenting it.

REMINDER OF PREVIOUS INCIDENTS

In the long confrontation between France and Great Britain that began in 1688 with the fall of the Stuart allies of Louis XIV and ended in 1815, France was only able to stand up to its rival at sea on two occasions: during the reign of Louis XIV, when France was at the time so powerful it was able to fight most of Europe on the ground whilst also maintining a strong naval force; and under Louis XVI,

OPPOSITE

Admiral Decrès (1761–1820) by René Théodore Berthon. The son of a cavalry officer, Decrès fought at the Battle of the Saintes and later became Minister of the Navy. He successfully built up the French Navy, turning a purged, directionless and demoralized force into a well equipped fighting arm capable of giving the Royal Navy a run for its money. (Photo RMN Paris / © Gerard Blot) during the American War of Independence, when French diplomacy was able to spare the country any involvement on the ground and had even obtained the support of significant allies such as Spain and Holland at sea. In every other case, France, bogged down in conflicts on the ground, had been forced to relinquish its efforts at sea little by little and had tasted the full force of British power. It had lost its colonies and saw its nautical trade ruined. Its squadrons, blocked in ports and having suffered heavy losses, were unable to act. Turning to a trade as a last resort produced disappointing results. The French governors, mostly possessed of a landsman mentality, quickly became resigned to being paralysed at sea and concentrated all their energies on countering the main threat, which had come from the north-east and which no maritime effort could see off.

This traditional scenario was replayed in 1793 with the same effects as during the Seven Years War. The situation was even worse because, in addition to the international restrictions, there was the disorder brought about by the French Revolution: a lack of organization, poor work at the naval dockyards and, even more serious, the emigration of nearly all the noble officers who had made up most of the staff officers of the old royal navy. Also, the setbacks experienced by the French naval forces during the first years of the conflict were particularly serious. In just a few years, more than 50 ships of the line had been lost. At the end of 1793, the Toulon affair, in which French royalists handed over the port to the British, cost 13 vessels. In 1794, the Prairial Battles, known in English as 'The Battle of the Glorious First of June', ended in the loss of seven ships. The great winter campaign of 1795 saw the disappearance of five ships due to the perils of the sea. Finally, at the battle of the Nile, Nelson destroyed a further 11 extra ships in August 1798. The human losses accompanying these misfortunes, even more serious because they were harder to replace, amounted to thousands of seamen, either killed in combat, death from illness or held prisoner in England. When the Trafalgar campaign began, despite a significant construction effort, France only had a fleet of around 45 vessels, and had the greatest difficulty in supplying them with qualified crews.

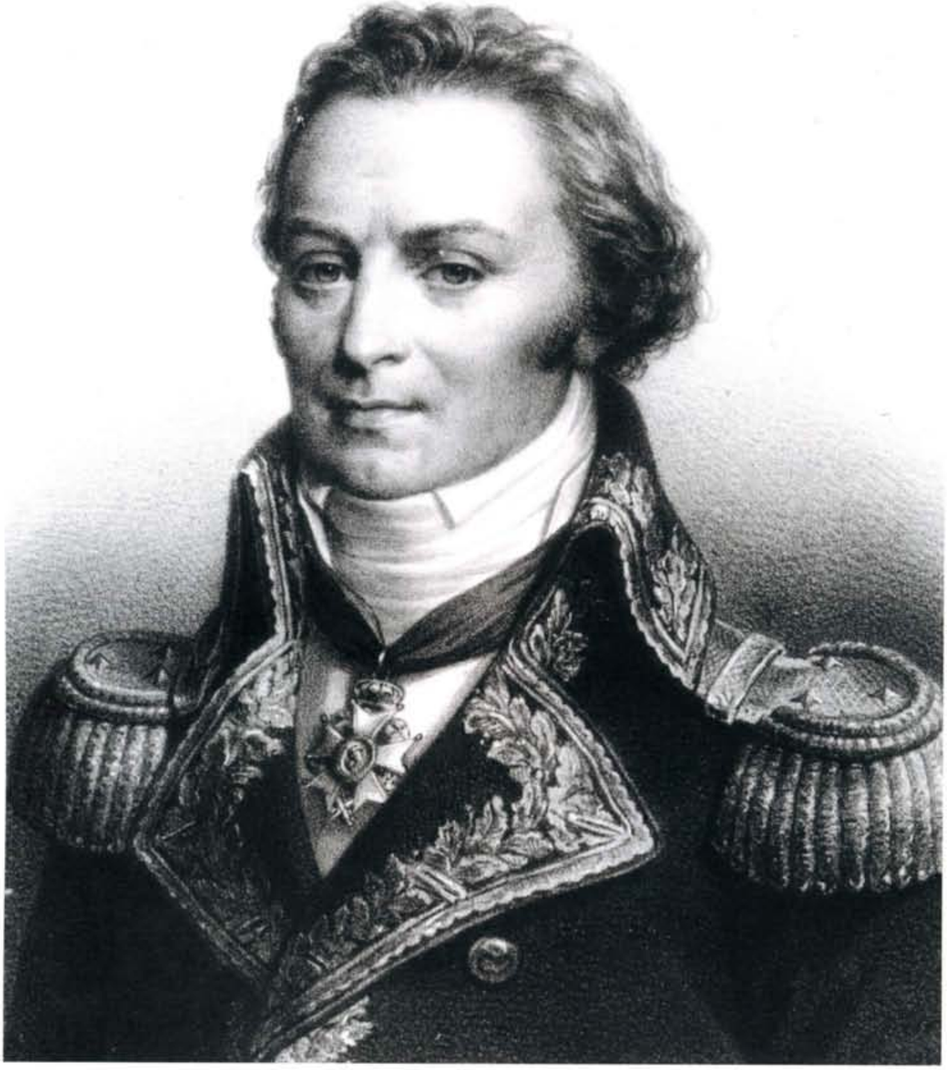
As for Spain, recent history had also been tragic. Placed in the camp of monarchies hostile to the French Revolution at the beginning of the war, it suffered heavy defeats on the ground and was forced to make a French alliance in the hope of avoiding an invasion of its territory. The sea battle against its ancient ally, Great Britain, cost it four vessels in 1797 with the severe defeat of Cape St Vincent. It had to hand over a further six to France and did not have sufficient finances to build new ones. Desperately trying to remain neutral after the Peace of Amiens was broken in May 1803, Spain thought it could buy its neutrality by paying France a monthly subsidy of four million francs. But it was easy for Great Britain to declare that this financial aid was nothing more than a rupture of the claimed neutrality. It used this as a pretext for the brutal aggression against four Spanish frigates off Portugal on 5 October 1804, which were carrying gold and silver from Peru. One of the ships exploded, the other three were seized and taken to England. Nevertheless, the joint pressure of Paris and indignant public opinion was needed to force the Spanish government, after several weeks of hesitation, to declare war on Great Britain. The naval potential which Spain provided to its ally was far from negligible. It still had around 30 vessels capable of being quickly rearmed in its arsenals at Ferrol, Cadiz and Cartagena. But these ships, which had not sailed for many years, were severely lacking in crew. The chronic shortage of seamen from which Spain was suffering had recently been further aggravated by a terrible yellow fever epidemic that had ravaged the sea-going population of Andalucia.

THE EMPEROR'S GRAND PLAN

The Peace of Amiens had been nothing more than a sort of truce, doomed to rupture because of the second thoughts of the two parties involved and their mutual unwillingness when the treaty was drawn up. When the conflict resumed, each of the two adversaries believed it could justify its hegemonic quest with noble ideals. The English presented themselves as the defenders of the European states against the aggression of an insatiable tyrant, whilst supporting and protecting the most retrograde and liberticidal regimes on the continent. The French claimed to be freeing the seas and oceans from the tentacles of the British. Everywhere they spread generous ideas about the Revolution, modernized worm-eaten societies and regimes, but behaved too often like pillagers, enslaving the people they claimed to emancipate. As for the Spanish, embarked on this adventure in spite of themselves, they were only concerned about preserving their declining empire, hoping without really believing that their alliance with the French would spare their home territory from being invaded, and would protect their colonies from the appetite of the British. They renewed the family pact established in 1761 between the Bourbons of France and Spain, which had served their interests well.

At the dawn of what was to be the last set-to between France and Great Britain, Napoleon decided to put an end to his most persistent enemy by striking at its heart through the invasion of its territory. For two years he devoted all his energies to and used all his imagination on this project. Some historians, however, claim that all this agitation was nothing more than a bluff aimed at dulling the vigilance of France's continental enemies in order to be able to take them more by surprise. This hypothesis does not seem acceptable to me. The immense material and financial means devoted to the undertaking, and perhaps even more the passion sparkling in the Emperor's correspondence, does not leave in any doubt the fact that he wanted to land in England.

Invasion plans had flourished in all the previous conflicts without ever getting off the ground. All the plans elaborated under the *Ancien Régime* involved gaining control of the Channel, at least temporarily, with an ocean-going fleet, and the embarkation of troops on transport ships. With the Revolution, a new idea came to light, that of the construction of a fleet built specifically for landing, comprising numerous flat-bottomed boats equipped with sails and oars that could land troops directly on enemy coastlines. The main promoter of this idea,



Admiral Louis René Levassor de Latouche-Tréville was one of the few French naval officers who had a successful record against Nelson. He died unexpectedly at Toulon and was replaced by Villeneuve. There has been inevitable speculation as to the likely outcome of the Battle of Trafalgar had he remained in command of the Combined Fleet. (© Musée National de la Marine/Latouche-Tréville)

the engineer Forfait,[2] had been inspired by the flotillas used by the Swedish and the Russians in the Baltic, without understanding that the hydrographical and meteorological conditions present in this sea were vastly different from those in the Pas de Calais. Forfait, who had placed heavy pieces of artillery at the front and back of the barges, even thought that a flotilla constituted in this way would be able to cross the strait without the help of a protective fleet. The campaign of 1801 demonstrated that this hope was an illusion. True, Latouche-Tréville had defended the light flotilla anchored at Boulogne against Nelson gloriously on two occasions, but this admiral, despite preferring small craft, had become aware of their very low military value and of their inability to operate in bad weather. When Napoleon drew up his plans for the invasion of England in 1803, although he envisaged an armada of around 2,000 small flat-bottomed craft to transport his army, he also provided for the intervention of a high seas fleet in the Channel to pave the way.

As the Emperor had such a fertile imagination and such a large capacity to multiply orders and counter-orders, there could have been an infinite number of solutions. What was the nature of the problem? In the vast operating theatre that was the Channel, the north Atlantic and the Mediterranean, the British had around 80 vessels that were armed[3] and more than ready for operation as they spent most of their time at sea. Napoleon could theoretically deploy 45 French vessels supported by around 30 Spanish vessels and approximately ten Dutch vessels against these forces. English authors never fail to observe that the two sides were very evenly matched from a numerical point of view, in fact that the odds were even in favour of the allies. However, a closer examination suggests a very different conclusion. The allies' vessels had been closed up in their ports for many months, and had therefore been deprived of any operational training. The main French squadron, comprising 21 vessels and based at Brest, was subject to a particularly tight blockade. The remaining French units were spread out between Rochefort and Toulon, but also Cadiz and Ferrol, where they found refuge when the war resumed. The Spanish forces were distributed between Cartagena, Cadiz and Ferrol. A very delicate problem concerning the concentration of forces, preceding any operation, had to be resolved. Napoleon understood that the Toulon squadron, comprising around ten vessels and far less severely blockaded than the other allied forces, should appear first and give the signal to begin the campaign.

Before Spain entered the war, the Emperor had planned to bring out the Toulon squadron, avoiding any contact with the enemy, reinforce it in the Atlantic by unblocking either the Ferrol squadron or the Rochefort squadron, and slip this fleet of around 15 vessels through to Boulogne incognito. This plan, based as it was on the avoidance of any confrontation with enemy squadrons, depended on surprise. It had a small chance of succeeding, notably by skirting around the north of the British Isles, if the mission were confined to a squadron of modest dimensions, made up of fast and well manned ships. Unfortunately, accustomed as he was to dealing with ground forces, Napoleon believed in the virtue of large armies and neglected the qualitative aspects. He always compelled his admirals to line up as many ships as possible, without understanding that a bad sailing ship or a vessel without qualified personnel constituted a hindrance rather than reinforcement for a squadron.

Once he had gained the support of the Spanish navy, Napoleon thought up new and ever more audacious plans which, while not specifically designed to provoke hostilities certainly did not exclude the possibility either, in view of the new force available. In the grandiose plan drawn up at the beginning of March 1805, the merged allied forces were to operate in the Antilles. The Rochefort squadron in the Antilles was to combine with the Toulon squadron, now reinforced by a Spanish squadron from Cadiz, and the Brest squadron, which in turn was to have freed the Franco-Spanish forces blockaded in Ferrol. This enormous fleet of nearly 60 vessels was to make a dash for the entrance to the Channel, where it would find nothing but inferior enemy forces. The British were expected to disperse and then pursue or seek out the allied squadrons. Their ships remaining in the Ushant region would be swept aside, and the triumphant combined fleet would gather outside Boulogne between 10 June and 10 July, allowing the 130,000 men in the Boulogne army to cross the strait and seal England's fate in a few days. 'We will then be the masters of the world,' Napoleon concluded.

THE ALLIED NAVAL HIGH COMMAND

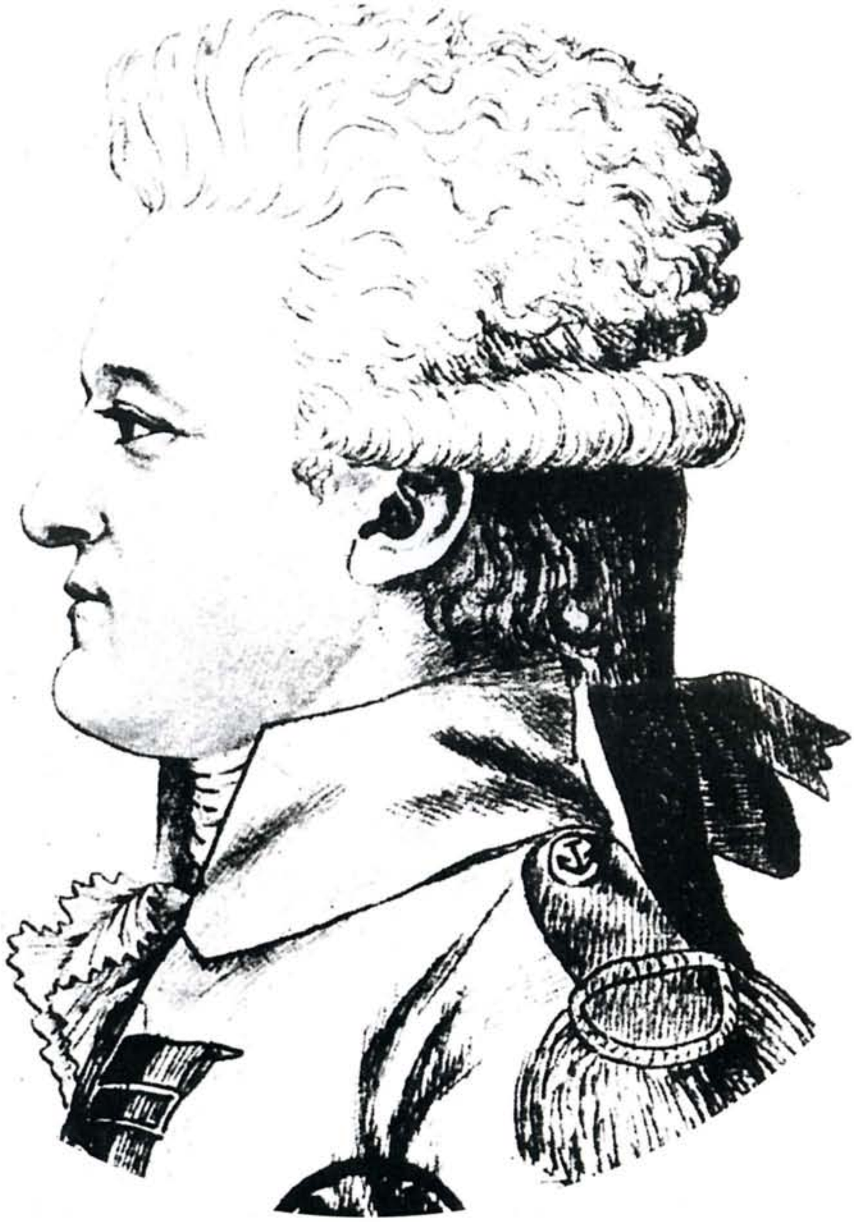
As we have just seen, it was Napoleon, and him alone, who drew up and led the naval operations. His Minister for the Navy, Admiral Decrès, confined to the role of manager of his ministry's human, material and financial resources, performed this task very well, but did not intervene in the area of operations other than to advise the Emperor or pass on orders. Moreover, following the fall of the *Ancien Régime*, the ministry no longer had the small operational cell made up of ship's officers that drew up campaign plans and followed their execution. Napoleon did not think it was a good idea to re-establish this small group of competent seamen in its private staff office, despite the fact that they would have been able to translate his strategic plans into realistic methods of action, taking into account the constraints of the naval environment. Rather, when he had a new idea, he preferred to consult admirals such as Ganteaume, Bruix or Latouche-Tréville, in whom he had a certain confidence. These officer generals, often far away from him, were required to give him an opinion despite not being in possession of all the facts, and of which he would not take the slightest notice. Thus it was that the Emperor, used to seeing everything bend to his will, would dictate his instructions from the solitude of his cabinet at St-Cloud or a town in Germany or Italy. He gave orders that were too detailed, often irrelevant, and which did not take into account weather conditions, the possible opposition of the enemy, transmission delays or the uncertainness of whether his messages would be received. He wanted to be able to control everything and alter everything at sea as he pleased, as he did on the ground. But while three horsemen can reorientate the march of a division in a few hours on the battlefield, at sea a frigate needs several weeks to find the squadron in the Antilles that is to have its mission modified.

Moreover, when it came to naval strategy and tactics, Napoleon had surprisingly traditional, if not retrograde, ideas. While he revolutionized the rules of combat on the ground, when it came to the navy his ideas were based on those that had been around in France under the *Ancien Régime*. Thus respect for the mission as commanded was above any other consideration and this precluded, for example, seizing the opportunity to destroy any enemy forces that might be encountered. Combat was never an end in itself, and was only accepted if it was the only way to accomplish the mission. This was very different from Nelson's attitude, which could be summed up in his oft-repeated orders to: 'annihilate the enemy'. Little by little, however, the Emperor came to understand the disadvantages of his method. Manipulating his admirals like pawns from a distance of thousands of miles

OPPOSITE
Admiral Villeneuve (1763–1806), although of aristocratic birth, survived the purges due to his revolutionary sympathies. Following the death of Admiral Latouche-Tréville at Toulon in 1804, Villeneuve was tasked with breaking through the British blockade, along with his Spanish allies. Although criticised for negative thinking, Villeneuve organized the Combined Fleet to constitute a significant foe. It exploded into disorder, however, following the two arrow strikes by the British fleet. After a spell of captivity in England, the demoralized Villeneuve is said to have committed suicide on his return to France. (© Musée National de la Marine/Amiral Villeneuve)

and through orders given several weeks earlier led to serious setbacks. It would have been better to explain the objective and to encourage them to use their own initiative so they would act for the best in whatever circumstances they encountered. It was also necessary to take any opportunity to destroy the enemy, and the last orders passed on by his minister called for a 'battle of extermination' without regard for the losses incurred. But this new stance came too late to change the course of the campaign. Moreover, it was received by admirals who were traumatized and paralysed by the Emperor's often unfair criticism.

Who were these people charged with carrying out their master's fluctuating but always imperious directives? In the French navy, three admirals came to play



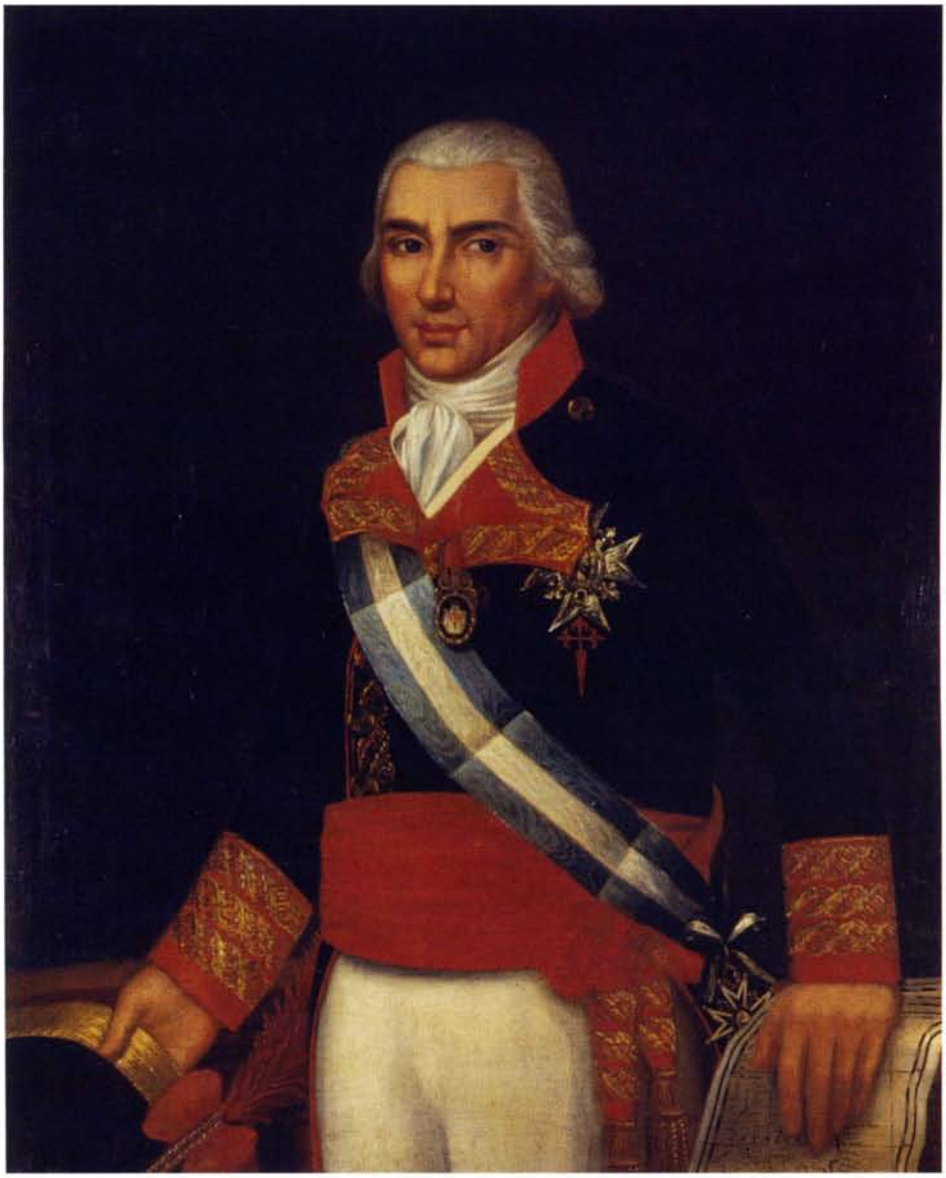
an important role in the Trafalgar campaign. It is important to note that these three men were all survivors of the battle of the Nile, and, fuelled by a bitter memory of this tragic event, they had developed a form of inferiority complex with regard to Nelson.

Decrès, minister for the navy from October 1801, was to stay in this position until the end of the Empire. A determined, energetic and intelligent worker with great professional competence, he proved his worth fighting a glorious battle against vastly superior forces on board the *Guillaume Tell*, shortly before the British took Malta. He was weakened unfortunately by a profound cynicism and an exaggerated concern for his career. He was afraid of being replaced and took care to keep all potential rivals away from positions of responsibility. He tended to favour his friends and all those from whom he had nothing to fear over chiefs with ambition and character. He made a major mistake by keeping his comrade Villeneuve at the head of the Toulon squadron, who, after an initial unfortunate sortie attempt in January 1805, asked to be relieved of his command. Decrès, who was also an excellent courtier, nevertheless forced himself, and not without courage, to educate Napoleon in naval matters, and to explain to him the constraints of the maritime environment.

At Brest, Ganteaume was in command of the largest and most powerful French squadron. He was a friend of the Emperor and the latter's most solicited advisor, all the more so for having brought him back from Egypt on board the frigate *Muiron*. The most faithful of the faithful, wild with admiration for Napoleon, Ganteaume was nevertheless described as a 'useless sailor without intellect' in *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*. On 24 March 1805, he sent a telegram proposing casting off at Brest with his 21 ships and entering into battle with the blockade force that was limited at the time to 15 ships. The Emperor's immediate response dissuaded him: 'A naval victory in such circumstances would not take me anywhere. Retire without engaging the enemy.' This absurd command was a serious blow to the admiral's morale.

Villeneuve owed his command to the premature disappearance of Latouche-Tréville, who died in Toulon harbour on board his flagship in August 1804. He never aspired to this responsibility and was completely surprised when he learned he had been given the main role in accomplishing the grand plan. Decrès had convinced Napoleon that from the list, albeit limited, of potential candidates, he was the best choice. He was a courageous and competent man, courteous and of agreeable demeanour. The British could not stop praising him, being surprised – a little naïvely – at having a real gentleman for a prisoner, when they had expected an uncouth and uncultured representative of the revolutionary navy. Villeneuve belonged to one of the oldest families in the Provence nobility and began his career as a midshipman in the navy of Louis XVI. This young admiral of 42 nevertheless had character traits that were incompatible with the exercise of great command. Very lucid, he analysed the factors leading to the superiority of the British navy at great length. His profound pessimism and chronic melancholy made him despair of being able to confront his adversaries successfully and even prevented him from trying. Extreme passiveness, which he had already demonstrated at the battle of the Nile,[4] led him to be resigned in the face of all the constraints put upon him and to accept the command of a mission of which he thought himself incapable. Several accounts show that, after he took command at Toulon, the morale of the squadron, which was at its highest under Latouche-Tréville, crumbled in just a few weeks. While his predecessor was extremely keen to square up again to the man he jokingly called 'his colleague Nelson', Villeneuve's one concern was how to avoid meeting a force that he considered to be superior to his own.

On the Spanish side, bearing in mind the unequal nature of the Franco-Spanish alliance, only one character really needs to be taken into account: Admiral Gravina, commander of the Spanish component of the combined fleet. This



Admiral Gravina (1756–1806) was the son of a Sicilian nobleman who had a distinguished career in the Spanish navy, and on one occasion worked alongside the British on an attack on Toulon. He fought against the British at the Siege of Gibraltar and again at Trafalgar. He was wounded on his flagship, *Príncipe de Asturias*, and rallied the remains of the fleet after the battle to lead them back to Cadiz. He died of his wounds the following year. (Museo Naval de Madrid)

49-year-old officer general belonged to the upper nobility and had benefited from a dazzling career, no doubt justified by his great merits but also helped by the very strong support he had in the Spanish court. In previous years he had already collaborated with the French on a number of occasions. After having participated in a Franco-Spanish campaign in the Mediterranean in 1799, he commanded the Spanish squadron at Brest – where it was blockaded in the port – for two years. In 1802, he participated in the St-Domingue expedition, transporting part of the expedition corps into this French colony. Finally, he had most recently been fulfilling the important role of Spanish ambassador in Paris for several months. On all these occasions, he had been able to earn the sympathy and often the friendship of those French with whom he came into contact. Latouche-Tréville said he was united to Gravina intellectually and emotionally. Decrès and even Napoleon held him in high esteem. During the whole of the Trafalgar campaign, Gravina was to Villeneuve a loyal and warm collaborator, providing him with real reassurance. This attitude irritates Spanish historians somewhat, who regret at times that another Spanish admiral was not chosen in place of this character, too Francophile for their taste. The names of Mazarredo and Grandallana are often quoted, both of whom had unquestionable professional qualities. But the former had greatly displeased Napoleon by his outspokenness and lack of flexibility when he was Spanish ambassador in Paris. As for the latter, his notorious francophobia meant he was unlikely to gain such a position. Incidentally Gravina, whilst being loyal and faithful to his allies, never forgot his own country's interests. Far from encouraging Villeneuve to lead the combined fleet to the Channel, he was able when the time came to use all his influence to reassure the latter in his decision not to carry out to the end a mission which did not serve Spanish interests in any way.

WEAKNESSES OF THE COMBINED FLEET

When one weighs the strengths and weaknesses of the fleets present at Trafalgar, it is surprisingly difficult to identify the advantages of the allied squadrons. Although the 27 British vessels capable of firing in a single shot around 24 tonnes of cannon balls were faced with 33 enemies in possession of a total of more than 32 tonnes of projectiles i.e. projectiles, as we shall see, the apparent advantage of the Franco-Spanish was an illusion. An analysis of the effective strength of a squadron should take numerous factors into account. Regarding materials, quantity is not everything: qualitative aspects are often determining factors. In the case of personnel, training and morale play a dominant role. Finally, intellectual strength should not be neglected, such as the combat doctrine shared by the commanders and the admirals' tactical ideas.

MATERIAL FACTORS

Historians from the three nations display a great deal of chauvinism when discussing the quality of their ships. The French believe they constructed the largest vessels – which is true[5] – but also the fastest and the most elegant. The Spanish consider that they succeeded in developing a happy synthesis between the French and British designs at the end of the 18th century, producing vessels that were both robust and fast. The English boast, and not without reason, of the solidity, simplicity and distinctly sea-going nature of their ships. Nevertheless, they did not hesitate to incorporate captured ships into their fleet, and even went as far as to copy their designs. Is the British reader aware that seven of Nelson's vessels at Trafalgar were of French design? Three were taken from the enemy, the *Tonnant*, the *Spartiate* and the *Belleisle*, while four were directly inspired by French designs, the *Achilles*, the *Ajax*, the *Leviathan* and the *Minotaur*. For their part, the French deployed two English vessels captured in combat, the *Swiftsure* and the *Berwick*. An impartial observer would probably conclude that the three fleets present at Trafalgar comprized for the most part high quality ships. The British units were very robust and also included security mechanisms such as drainage pumps. The Spanish vessels' weak point was their masts, which were somewhat over-proportioned and very fragile. This fault was also shared by the French ships, but to a lesser degree. Regarding the strength of the vessels, it can be seen that it was the British who had the advantage with seven triple-deck ships, while the allies deployed just four, all Spanish, two of which were excellent – the *Principe de Asturias* and the *Santa Ana* – and two very mediocre, the *Santísima Trinidad* and the *Rayo*.

With regard to artillery, the British advantage is much clearer. For their heaviest projectile, the English adopted the 32lb cannon ball (14.5kg), while the Franco-Spanish stuck with the 36lb calibre (17.6kg).[6] This difference in weight, of which the chargers were very sensitive, made Nelson's sailors' work easier, and helped facilitate a faster rate of fire. Moreover, the recent progress in English metallurgy meant that, with an equal calibre, the British pieces were lighter than those of their adversaries. Here, too, the result was greater convenience and speed in loading and firing the cannons, not to mention the reduced strain on the structure of the ship. But the most decisive advantage the British had was the possession of a particularly fearsome weapon: the carronade. In service since the American War of Independence, these short and light large-calibre cannons allowed large volleys of shot to be fired from a short distance. The French, who knew this weapon well, had been reluctant to use it for a long time because they were critical of its weak range and imprecision. Napoleon and Decrès nevertheless understood the interest in the weapon. They ordered large-scale production of the carronade without managing to equip the ships with it before Trafalgar. As for the Spanish, they had a few rare models of this type of weapon, which was to show its worth in the close combat which Nelson sought.

THE MEN

While the Royal Navy still used the barbarous system of the press gang to form crews for its warships, France and Spain had the more humane and rational naval subscription and '*matrícula de mar*', organizations charged with levying the seamen necessary for equipping the State's ships. This situation gave the two nations a significant theoretical advantage, notably at the beginning of a conflict, for the rapid establishment of competent crews. But in France, where war had been practically incessant since 1793, the relatively limited 'stock' of available professional seamen was nearly exhausted. Battles, illness and imprisonment in England had done their work, while the collapse of the commercial fleet compromised the training of new seamen. The recruitment drives carried out in 1804 to equip the newly constructed units were ineffective, and it was necessary to resort to expedients to form the crews: drawing on already bloodless local units, turning to black prisoners evacuated from St Domingue and hiring foreign sailors. All these steps having proved insufficient, the land army was forced to contribute men, either to complement the crews or garrisons[7] or to provide passenger troops. In total, the French vessels at Trafalgar were significantly overmanned as a result of the heavy presence of soldiers. On some ships, the proportion of men belonging to the ground forces was 48 per cent, although it should not have passed 15 per cent according to the standards in force. The lack of real sailors meant the vessels were less able to carry out manoeuvres. The over-population of the ships led to a worsening of hygiene conditions and a reduction in self-sufficiency in terms of supplies. On the other hand, the numerous soldiers provided significant help servicing cannons, sharpshooters and assault teams.

On the Spanish vessels, the situation was to a great extent comparable. The '*matrícula de mar*' was only able to provide one quarter of the necessary seamen, and it was necessary to resort to regrettable measures such as the forced embarkation of vagabonds, beggars or criminals charged with light penalties. Ground troops also made a large contribution.

The British navy also had serious difficulties recruiting its crews. It was very far from having at its disposal all the good sailors it would have liked. Nevertheless, it made arrangements for putting a few dozen excellent sailors (topmen) on each ship to assure safe and rapid sailing. Moreover, the statutory crews of the English ships were less numerous, but with the same strength as their adversaries. However, the determining factor in favour of the British was the training of the men. The English squadrons, comprising ships that had been at sea for months, were pitted against units that had been anchored since the war had resumed in May 1803, prisoners of the blockading forces. The situation was particularly dramatic for certain Spanish vessels, armed at Cadiz with improvised crews, who were to be thrown into the blaze of a terrible battle the day after they cast off for the first time. The Spanish command judged them barely able to sail, and certainly not able to fight.

THE ADMIRALS' TACTICAL IDEAS

Nelson's tactical genius is often lauded as if the great man had invented original methods and then put them into practice at Trafalgar. This is not the case at all. Line rupturing and the concentration of attacking forces on a portion of the enemy formation had already been practiced on many occasions, notably in 1782 at the battle of the Saintes won by Rodney against de Grasse, and, more recently, on 1 June 1794 , the Glorious First of June,[8] when Admiral Howe, dividing his fleet into four columns, cut the French line at various points. In France, Suffren demonstrated plenty of spirit and aggressiveness in the attack on the British squadrons at the time of his famous campaign in India, but failed to obtain the collaboration from his captains which would have been necessary for the full success of his undertakings. Nelson's merit lay in his having spent a long time considering the method to use to obtain the most complete destruction possible of his adversary, and having ardently researched the ways to achieve this end. His thoughts, undoubtedly spurred on by his hatred of the French,[9] marked a turning point in naval history. Before him, admirals did not have the annihilation of the enemy as their main objective, but rather gave preponderant weight to accomplishing the mission with which they had been charged. With Nelson, like Napoleon in the case of ground conflicts for that matter, we were entering into the era of wars of great destruction, where ideology played a dominant role. The British admiral was persuaded to fight, with God's help, against the enemies of order, legitimate sovereigns and the one true religion.

The tactic of breaking the opposing line, systematized by Nelson, presented serious disadvantages. It would have led to heavy setbacks if it had been used against an enemy possessing the same capabilities of manoeuvre and a comparably effective artillery. The vessels placed at the head of columns, subjected to the concentrated fire of numerous enemy units without being able to respond for a long time, ran the risk of arriving at the enemy line in a crippled state and of being overpowered there by forces in possession of all their faculties. With audacity, even temerity according to some, Nelson decided that it was worth running the risk and he won his bet. But the genius of the British admiral lay not so much in his aggressive tactics as in the enthusiasm he was able to create in his captains and the manner in which battle was led. With hindsight, these are the exceptional leadership qualities of the greatest English admiral that deserve the most admiration.

Villeneuve, for his part, had also thought long and hard on an encounter that he feared with the victor of the Nile. Many months before, he had guessed and described precisely the tactics his adversary would adopt. 'The enemy,' he began writing in December 1804, 'will not stop at creating a battle line parallel to ours and at delivering an artillery battle, often won by the most cunning, but always by the luckiest. He will seek to surround our rear guard, to cross us and to carry his own squadrons upon those vessels of ours that he will have separated, in order to surround and reduce them.' This pertinent analysis, this extraordinary lucidity was nevertheless accompanied by pessimism and passiveness which prevented him from devising an original disposition of forces and from giving his fleet the benefit of the effect of surprise, on which his adversary was – wrongly – counting. The allied vessels, he thought, could not do anything other than deploy in the tightest line possible against the attacks of the enemy. The adopted course of action – to alternate the French and Spanish units in order to demonstrate better the solidarity between the two countries – undoubtedly reduced even further the manoeuvring capacity of the mixed divisions. How was one to demand highly complicated manoeuvres from formations in which the units did not know one another and who certainly had not had the least bit of training? At Gravina's suggestion, an 'observation' squadron had nevertheless been made up and placed under the orders of the Spanish admiral. This formation, which was destined to remain to windward of the battle corps, could have attempted to impede the assault from the British columns. We shall soon see that this was not the case.

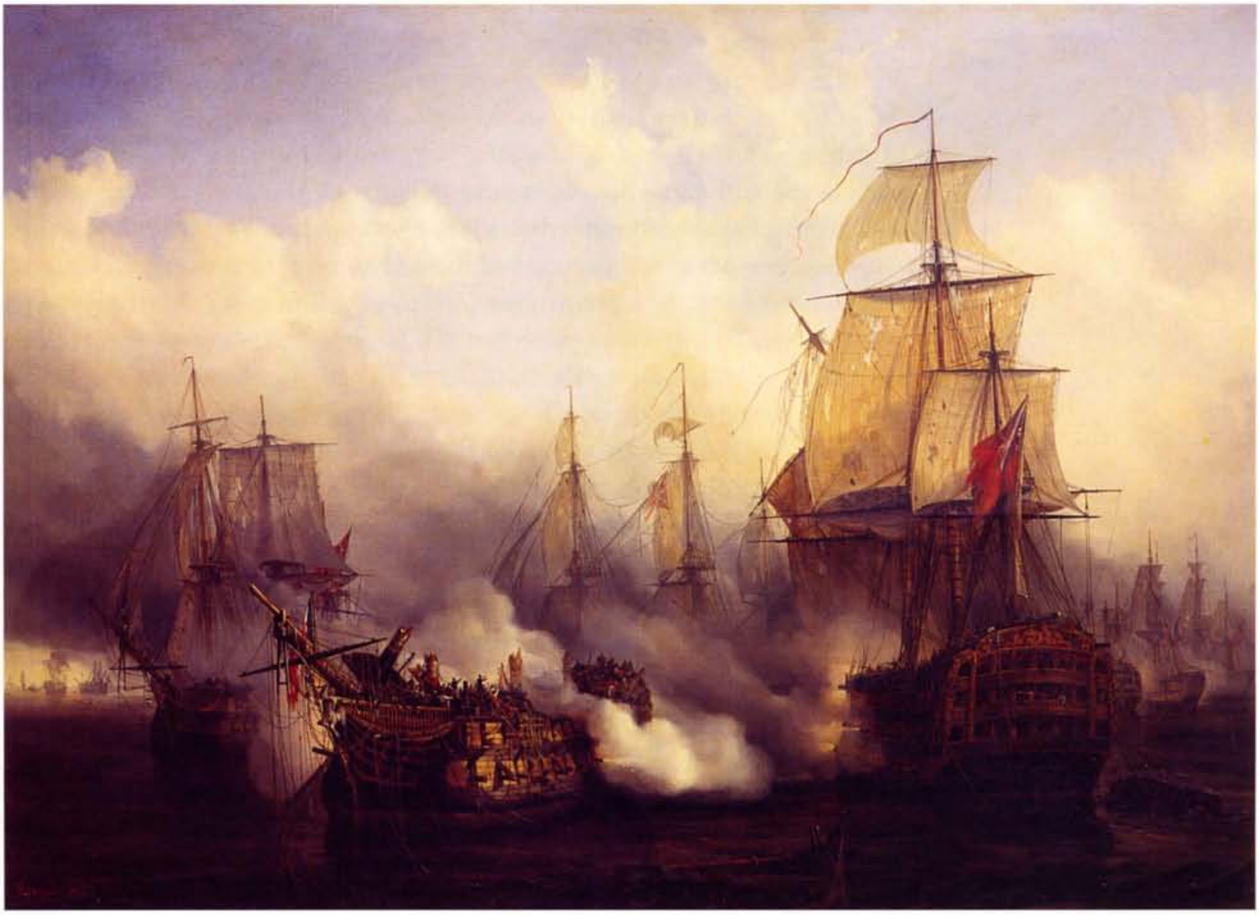
THE COLLAPSE OF THE GRAND PLAN

A series of events were to, either directly or indirectly, put the Emperor's dream in check. Missiessy, the admiral commanding Rochefort's squadron, did not receive the order to stay in the Antilles in time, and came back to Rochefort according to instructions. Ganteaume, commander of the Brest squadron, was never allowed to cast off without fighting, according to orders of the most imperative nature. Villeneuve, in charge of the Toulon squadron, succeeded in leaving his base, and reinforced himself with seven vessels at Cadiz, one French and six Spanish ships, to arrive without hindrance at Fort-de-France on 15 May. After a vain attempt and the arrival of new instructions, the combined fleet, reinforced with two ships from Rochefort, departed again for Europe on 10 June, not to deploy at the entrance to the Channel, but to remove the blockade facing the forces trapped at El Ferrol. Far from 'flying', the Franco-Spanish fleet, hindered by slow ships and burdened with sick crew members, did not appear off Cape Finisterre until 22 July, only to run into Admiral Calder's squadron. After an indecisive battle fought in fog, during which two Spanish ships were lost after falling into the English line, Villeneuve disembarked the sick and injured at Vigo, where he also got rid of three of the worst ships, one French and two Spanish, which were slowing down the fleet. He then went to El Ferrol where he was able to call five French and nine Spanish ships to his flag. Finally, on 13 August, he cast off for Brest in order to unblock Ganteaume's squadron there. He was already very late.

During this time the British squadrons, contrary to Naploean's predictions, had not dispersed. Nelson, however, in accord with the Emperor's wishes, had lost one month in the Mediterranean where he was protecting Egypt and the kingdom of Naples which he believed to be under attack, before hurrying to the Antilles where he only just missed the allied forces. The other admirals, obeying an unwritten order known by all, had gathered in the region of Ushant following the loss of contact with the forces they should have been surveying. Nelson himself ended up taking the same course of action. On 14 August, 39 British ships barred entrance to the Channel on the orders of Admiral Cornwallis. This was much more than was necessary to stop the 29 ships that now formed the combined fleet. Villeneuve on the other hand, aware that superior forces were awaiting him, and eaten up by an almost pathological pessimism which made him see all the very real weaknesses of his fleet in a much worse light, ceased to continue his journey north on 15 August, and retreated to Cadiz.

THE BATTLE: A DISASTER ACCEPTED FOR HONOUR

Among the numerous myths inspired by the battle of Trafalgar, one of the most tenacious is that Nelson's victory saved Great Britain from invasion by the French. On 23 August 1805, even before he learned of Villeneuve's retreat, the Emperor had taken the decision to take down the camp at Boulogne and to launch the Grande Armée into the famous campaign that was to lead to the crushing of the Austrians and the Russians at Austerlitz. When Villeneuve cast off from Cadiz on 20 October, he directed his fleet not towards the Channel, but towards Gibraltar and the Mediterranean, where he was to fulfil a completely secondary mission to support the French forces fighting in the kingdom of Naples. Napoleon, exasperated by his admiral's behaviour, had decided to replace him several weeks earlier. But working on the ridiculous assumption that Villeneuve, being far too fainthearted, would not carry out the last orders he had received, he had sent Admiral Rosily to Cadiz to take command of the combined fleet without having informed the disgraced captain. An extraordinary combination of circumstances, notably Rosily's delay, having been immobilized in Madrid following a broken carriage axle, meant that Villeneuve got wind of



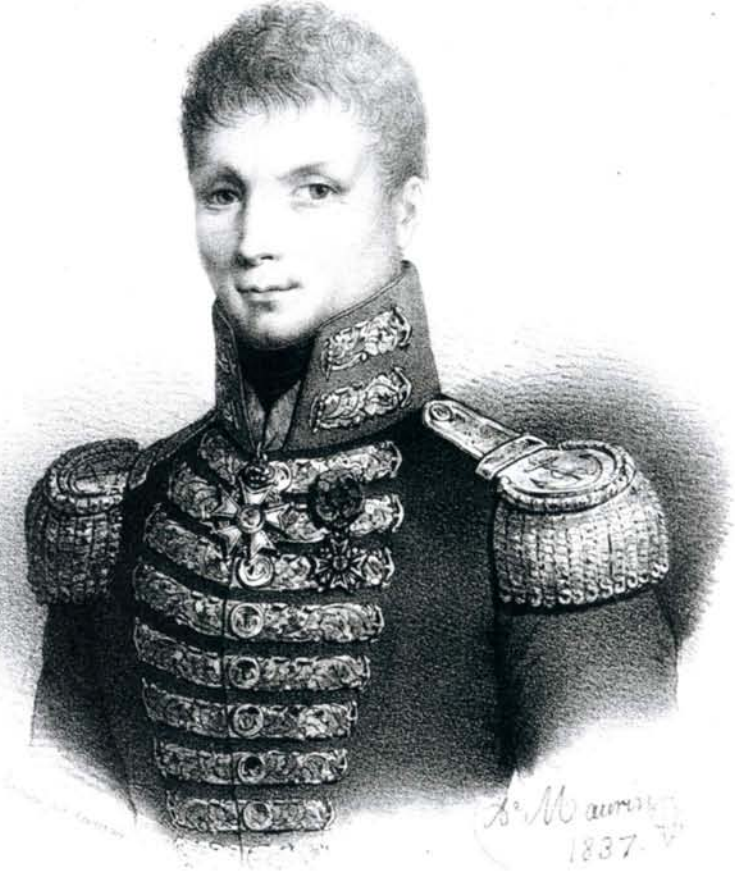
Le Redoutable *a la bataille de Trafalgar* by Auguste-Etienne-Francois Mayer. The *Redoutable* was at the thick of the action in the Battle of Trafalgar. Coming to the aid of *Bucentaure*, she became locked with Nelson's flagship, *Victory*. The three-hour battle that ensued resulted in the death of Nelson while *Victory* herself only narrowly escaped capture by *Redoutable*'s highly trained assault teams due to the timely arrival of HMS *Téméraire*. (Photo RMN / © Bulloz) his disgrace and replacement. Not having been informed officially, he believed – and what's more this contained something of the truth – that his friend Decrès had wanted to provide an opportunity for him to redeem himself and to avenge his outraged honour. It was with the energy of despair that the admiral, using as a pretext favourable wind conditions and a momentary and unrecognized weakness in the blockading forces, ordered the cast off. He was able, on this occasion, to convince his Spanish allies. The latter, however, had been more than reticent at the time of a war council held on 8 October where a joint agreement had been reached that the superiority of the English fleet was such that it would be necessary to await favourable circumstances. It is not easy to explain Gravina's change in attitude: should one see it as a demonstration of his faultless loyalty and Spanish honour, or as the result of pressure exercised by the Madrid court, so completely subordinated to the Emperor?

We will not attempt to repeat a detailed account of the battle here, as this would duplicate other chapters in this work. Our only aim is to provide the British reader with a Franco-Spanish point of view on the battle, and to suggest a few reasons allowing for a better comprehension of the allies' behaviour.

One initial comment is necessary. The battle was indecisive for a long time, and the resistance of the combined fleet was much more dogged than one would have thought given its weaknesses. It would not have taken much to tip the battle into a completely different scenario.

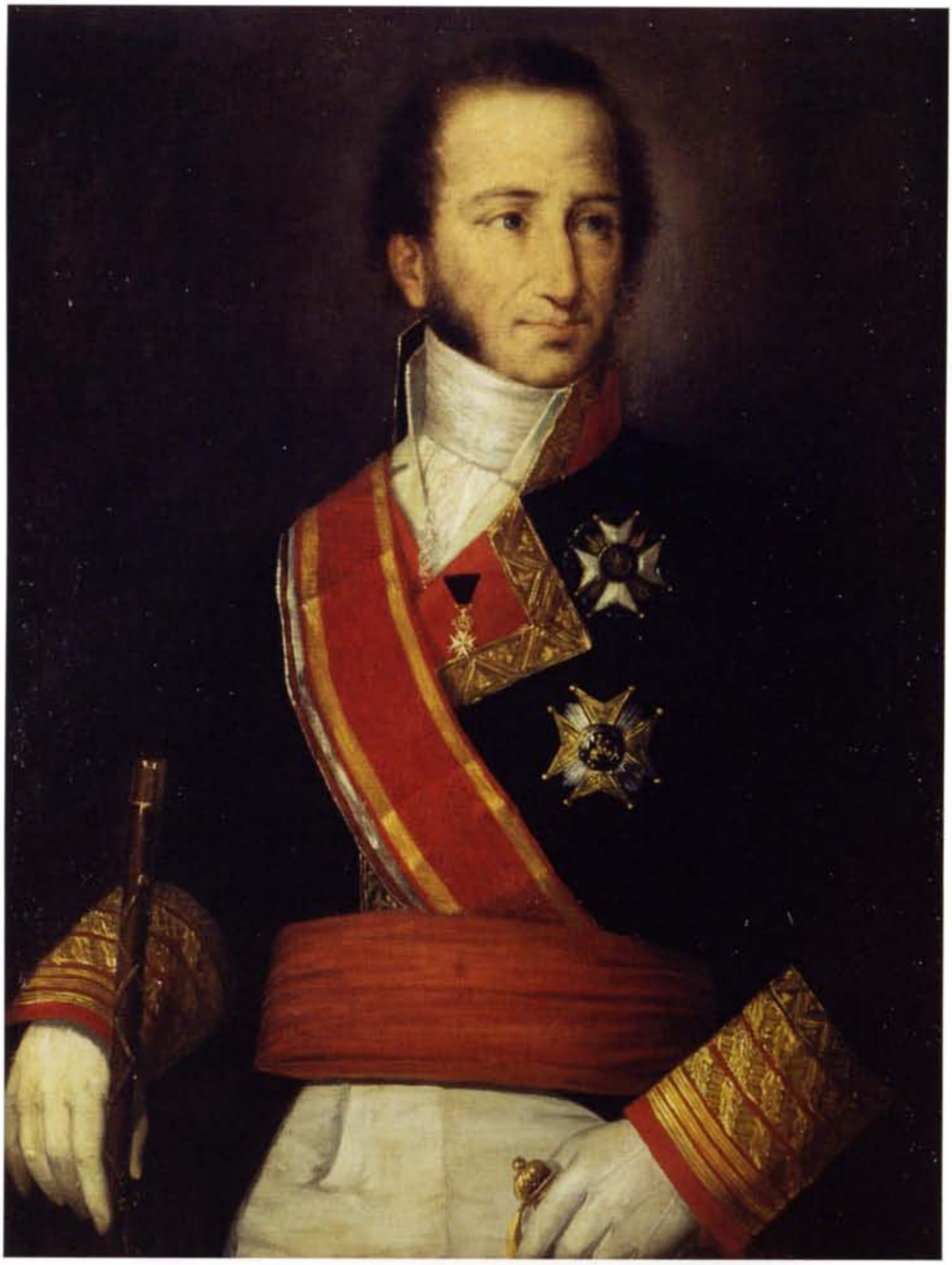
The British hoped, to a greater or lesser degree, to see their adversaries flee with the wind behind them in the face of their attacking columns. They found before them determined men waiting in a long line, doubled in numerous places, in a crescent shape with the points advancing. Some took this arrangement to be an elaborate tactic[10]: the tips of the crescent could close on the attackers who, after having crossed the first line, would find themselves trapped between two lines of fire. However, only chance and the difficulties encountered by the allies in obtaining correct formation were behind this supposedly shrewd plan of action.

All the allied witnesses agree on the disorder of the two English columns, divided into numerous platoons, which rushed towards the enemy cramming on sail. However, behind this apparent anarchy were Nelson's elaborate tactics. The north column, which he was leading himself, threatened the allied rear guard first, before falling back on the centre and breaking through the corner in the middle of the battle corps formed by the three triple-deckers placed at the head. The south column, under the direction of Collingwood, was deployed on his right as planned, and, formed as a rough relief line, surrounded the whole of the allied rear guard. The greatest shock was in the centre. *Victory*, *Téméraire* and *Neptune*, which had only suffered minor losses and damage in their approach, met the wall formed by the immense *Santísima Trinidad* followed by the *Bucentaure*, the French flagship, and the *Redoutable*. Nelson, one of whose great merits had been his confidence in his subordinates, allowed Hardy, his flag captain, to choose the point of impact. Hardy chose the *Redoutable*, a 74-cannon ship, the most feeble-looking of the three adversaries. He thought he would be able to see it off easily.



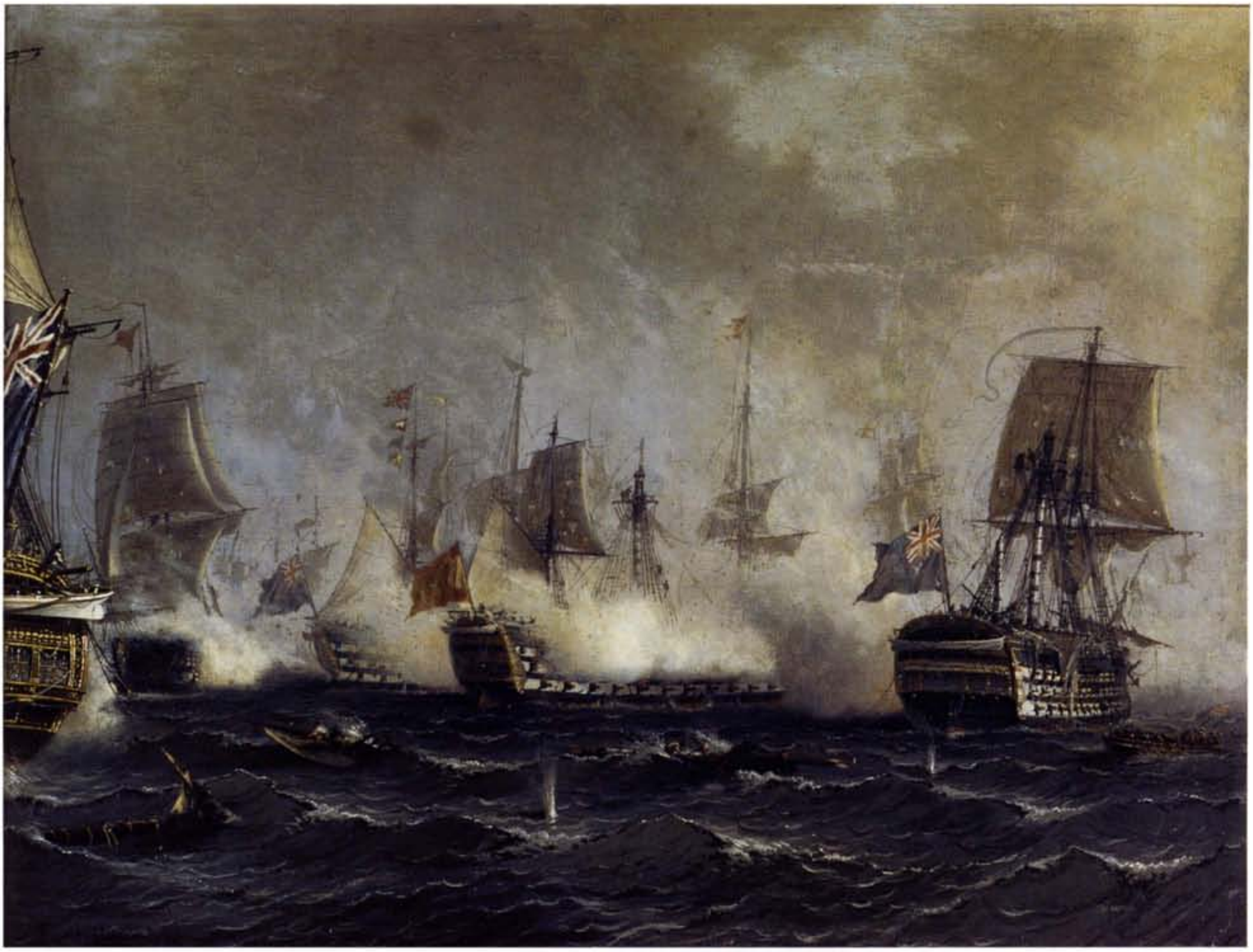
Captain Lucas was largely responsible for salvaging French honour in the Battle of Trafalgar. Having trained sharpshooters and assault teams to a make up for the superiority of British gunnery, he was on the verge of capturing HMS *Victory* herself, had it not been for the timely arrival of HMS *Téméraire*. Although *Victory* survived, Nelson himself succumbed to his worthy foe. (© Musée National de la Marine/Lucas, Lithographie de Maurin, 1837)

The battle fought by the *Redoutable* remains in the annals as one of the greatest feats of arms of the French navy. Lucas, who was commanding this ship, nevertheless did not benefit from favourable circumstances. His ship had just undergone a great deal of repairs. He had been manned at El Ferrol with an improvised crew, made up for the large part of personnel taken from other ships. The ship had only had six days to get used to the sea, the length of the crossing between El Ferrol and Cadiz. Its commander nevertheless succeeded in making it a splendid battle instrument. Lucas, who came from Marennes near Rochefort, was 41 years old. He began his career as a ship's boy in the French navy, and distinguished himself during the American War of Independence. A petty officer specialising as a pilot, he was one of those junior officers who had experienced lightning promotion thanks to the Revolution, in his case completely justified. Aware like other French commanders of the superiority of the British artillery, Lucas banked to a great extent on the use of sharpshooters and on assault. He constantly trained his men and communicated his enthusiasm and confidence. The rigorous organization of his ship and the proficiency of his soldiers and sailors were marvellous. In spite of the difference in rank separating the two vessels, the *Redoutable*, which had its bowsprit on the stern of the *Bucentaure*, faced the attack of the *Victory* without flinching, launching all its grapnels at the



Cayetano Valdés (1767–1835) was a Spanish naval officer and hydrographer who carried out extensive surveys of the north-west coast of North America. He fought against Admiral Howe's squadron in 1782. As captain of the *Neptuno*, he received a serious wound at Trafalgar. He was later to be exiled from Spain, seeking refuge in England, but returned to become Captain-General of the Spanish fleet. (Museo Naval de Madrid)

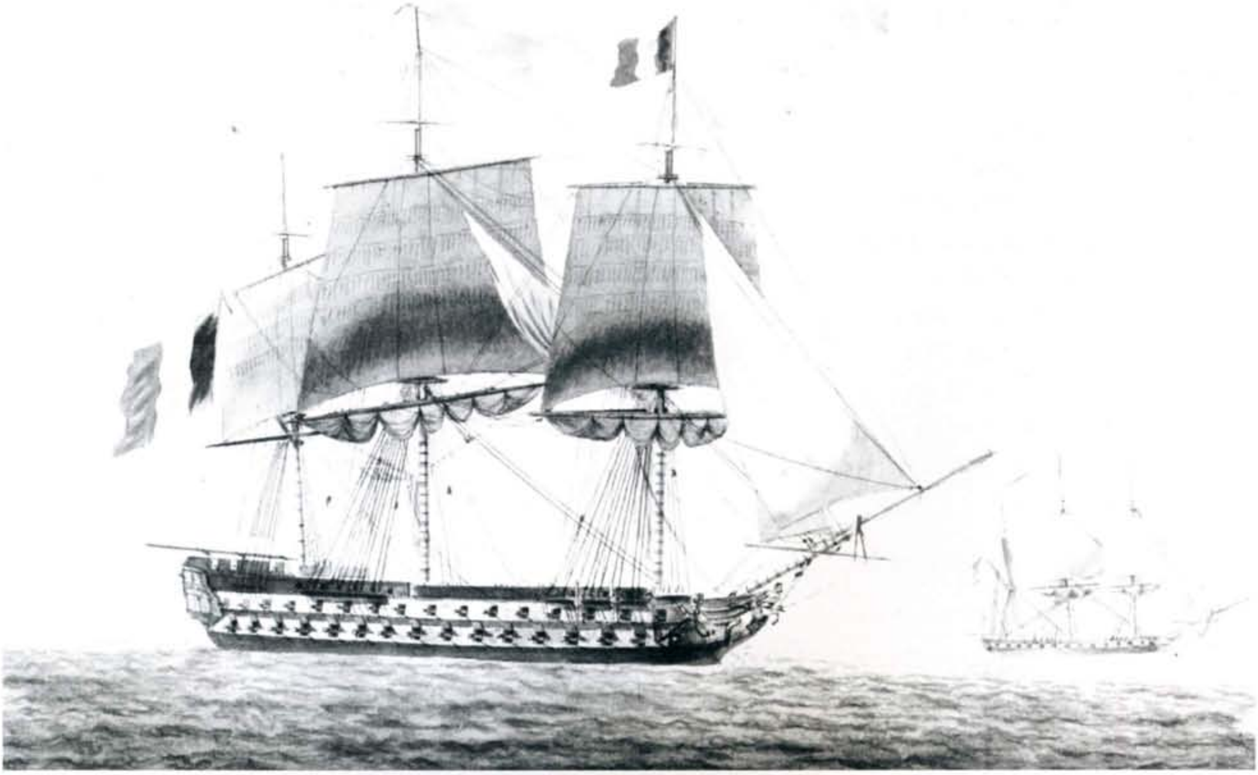
latter. With a tight hold on each other, the two ships began a fight to the death. Bit by bit, David gained the upper hand on Goliath. From the topmasts of the *Redoutable* there fell a hail of gunfire and grenades. The British ship's gunners were fired upon through the scuttles at point-blank range by the French soldiers stationed in the batteries. The death of Nelson[11] provoked a moment of stupor and Lucas saw that the moment had come to attempt the attack that his whole crew was waiting for. At the trumpet signal, the attacking divisions jumped on the forecastles. 'They climbed aboard in such an orderly fashion,' Lucas wrote, 'the officers and midshipmen at the head of their companies, that one could have



Trafalgar tableau showing the action between the Spanish ship *Santa Ana*, under Vice-Admiral Alava, and the British *Royal Sovereign*, under Vice-Admiral Collingwood. (Oil on cloth by Angel Cortellini Sánchez c. 1903) (Museo Naval de Madrid)

believed it to be nothing more than a training session.' The main yard was brought to serve as a deck as the wall of the triple-decker was much larger than that of its adversary. Some men were already aboard the *Victory* and the attacking teams were about to rush forward when the *Téméraire* appeared and, with a great volley of all its artillery, swept away the decks and the forecastles of the *Redoutable*. The *Victory* was saved, but Nelson had come across a worthy adversary for his final battle.

After very difficult battles, the three powerful British ships placed at the head of the column led by Nelson succeeded in beating their opponents. *Santísima Trinidad* and *Bucentaure*, completely dismasted, suffered heavy losses and were gradually rendered powerless. They received little help from the allied ships that had fallen to leeward, while the English column continued to feed their adversaries with fresh units. Villeneuve, who had sought death in vain and acknowledged the impossibility of leaving his ship, was forced to resolve to strike his flag at around 3:30p.m. Lucas, whose ship was completely devastated, was forced to do the same, but not without having inflicted painful losses on the *Téméraire*. This ship, like the *Victory*, was in any case unable to continue to fight effectively.



Bucentaure was the 80-gun flagship of Admiral Villeneuve and before that of Admiral Latouche-Tréville. She was widely admired for her balanced and elegant lines. *Bucentaure* was on the receiving end of the battering ram of the first English column, led by Nelson, and, although she received assistance from the *Santísima Trinidad* (140), *Neptuno* (80) and *Redoutable*, she gradually succumbed to consecutive British attacks. *Bucentaure* was later washed on to the rocks of the Spanish coast and wrecked. (© Musée National de la Marine/Le Vaisseau Bucentaure)

A large-scale and rapid intervention on the part of the allied rear guard, which was barely engaged in the first phase of the battle, could have reversed this situation. But Dumanoir, the young French admiral commanding this force, lacked initiative and decisiveness. When he did finally decide to give the order to tack, following a request from Villeneuve, his main preoccupation was to rectify the alignment of his ships and to ensure they kept to the regulation distances. Thus there appeared the bizarre spectacle of the *Formidable* followed by three other French ships, all impeccably aligned, crossing the entire battlefield windward of the combat zone, shelling the British units from long range. Several ships did not follow Dumanoir's orders. Two of these, the French *Intrépide* and the Spanish *Neptuno*, made straight for the *Bucentaure* and the *Santísima Trinidad*. Soon overwhelmed by far superior forces, they succumbed after an heroic resistance. Others which had fallen leeward left the battle and headed for Cadiz.

Collingwood fulfilled his pledges perfectly by taking on the best of the allies' 15 rear guard ships, in battles that were often fierce. The pattern followed was always the same. The British ships placed at the head of the different platoons which made up the attacking column attacked the allied line in several places. They experienced some very difficult moments before receiving help from the ships following them, as each individual vessel had to face numerous adversaries. But the enemy's shots were too slow and ill-adjusted to prevent them crossing the line. In close combat, the carronades played a decisive role by neutralising the allies' superiority in muskets and assault teams with their devastating anti-personnel fire.

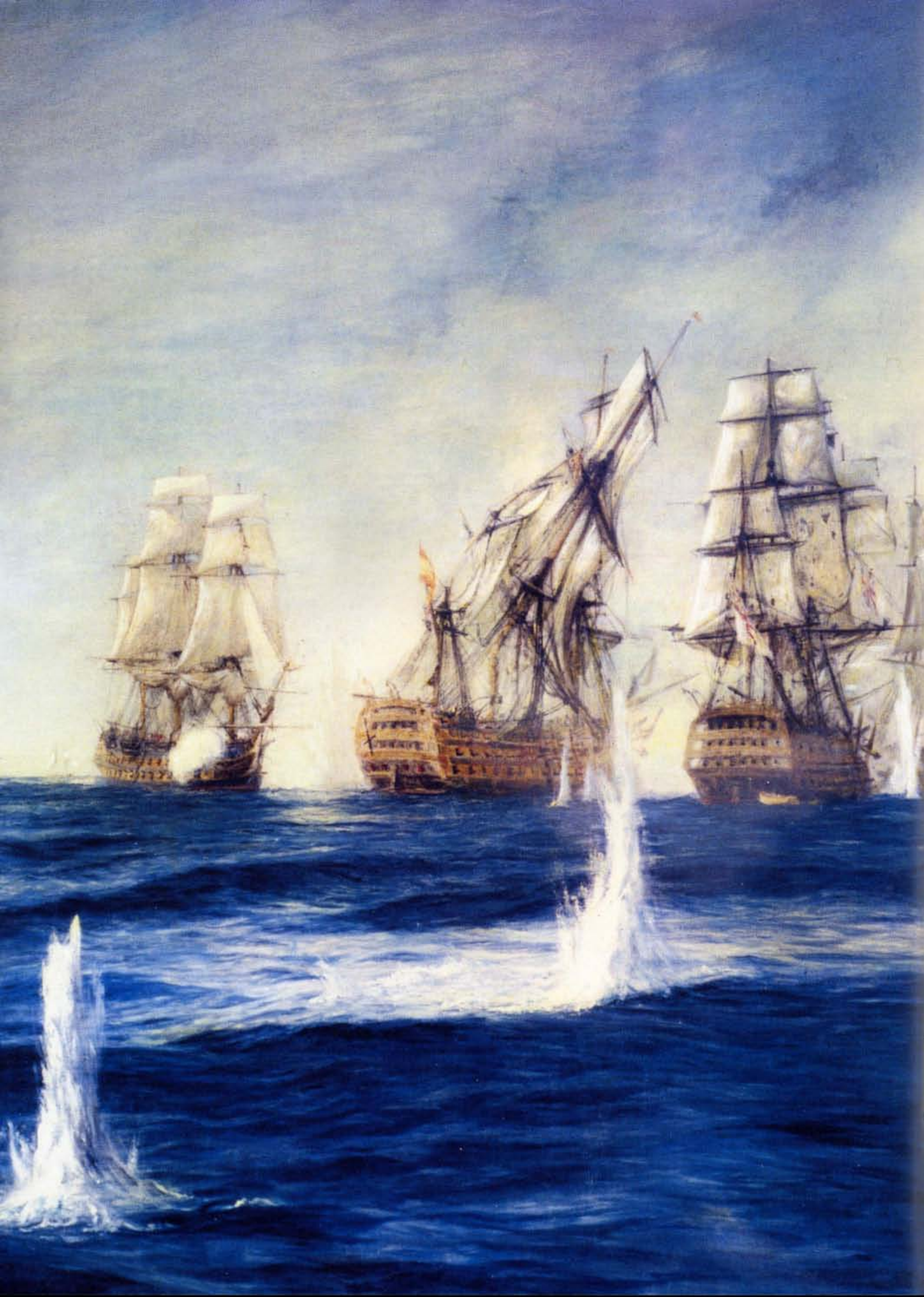
With the exception of the *Principe de Asturias*, a flagship whose crew had been formed with particular care, the Spanish ships were difficult to manoeuvre. Placed in the front line, they fought with great courage, like the *Santa Ana*, the crew of which was nevertheless completely untrained. Those ships that fell to leeward did not in general succeed in participating effectively in the combat. When the battle turned in favour of the attacking force, some managed to escape, while others were caught and taken.

Several French ships, like the *Pluton* and the *Argonaute,* distinguished themselves by good manoeuvrability, which enabled them to avoid being captured after having fought vigorously. Many succumbed after heroic combat, such as the *Fougueux,* the *Aigle* and the *Achille,* which exploded towards the end of the battle.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF TRAFALGAR

The strategic consequences of Trafalgar were quite limited. The hopes of the British combatants of a glorious peace if they won were decidedly in vain. Undoubtedly the threat of a French invasion was ruled out definitively, and Great Britain, from then on the undisputed mistress of the seas, would be able to seize her adversaries' colonies and ruin the little that remained of their commercial traffic. But the war was to last another ten years, and it would be the coalition ground forces which would put an end to it at Waterloo.

On a psychological level, on the other hand, the fallout from the battle was immense. For the British the event was the most glorious peak in the history of the Royal Navy, a sort of apotheosis from which Nelson, the hero, emerged as a demi-god.[12] The entire nation drew pride and confidence in its destiny from Trafalgar. The French, scarred by the scale of the disaster, felt that their maritime activities were being struck by a kind of bad omen. The landsman mentality of the nation, which is strongly rooted in its history, was justified and reinforced. The French sailors themselves were resigned to never being more than second best at sea. For the Spanish, the event had a completely different resonance. Having fought for honour, for the benefit of an ungrateful ally, the only thing that resonates with them from the whole affair is the heroism of their fighters and the glory that they acquired. In Madrid there is a square, an avenue and even an entire district named after Trafalgar!



CHAPTER FIVE

NAVAL TACTICS IN THE AGE OF SAIL

DR NICHOLAS TRACY

Naval tactics are dominated by the limitations of ship design, the technologies of naval armament, and by the age old limitations of human courage and strength. Square rigged sailing ships were unable to hold any course closer than 6 points, or 67 degrees from the direction the wind was blowing. The ship of the line was the only weapon system ever developed which could deploy its weapons only at right-angles to its line of advance. And the capacity of admirals to develop tactics to deal with those restrictions was severely restrained by the limitation of signalling systems. Nelson was a unique naval leader, but his tactics at Trafalgar were a product of two-and-a-quarter centuries of experience in the Royal Navy of warfare by fleets of great sailing ships armed with batteries of heavy guns.

When cannons were first mounted on sailing vessels, the heaviest guns were the chase guns firing over the bow. This practice was copied from the oared galleys which had dominated naval warfare until the mid-16th century, but unlike galleys, sailing vessels could not count on being able to steer a course which would permit the laying of the bow guns against the enemy. On the other hand, sailing vessels were built heavily enough, and with enough beams, that great guns could be mounted along the decks to permit firing at right angles to the keel. Accordingly, the smaller guns were disposed so as to ensure that at least one weapon could be brought to bear on any relative bearing. A ship lying-to could defend itself against galleys attacking from any direction. But while this arrangement served the needs of the armed traders who first made use of great sailing ships, it was less useful for a ship of war pressing home an attack under sail. To employ its full gun power it was necessary for a 16th-century galleon to tack or wear about to open the firing arc of each gun in turn. Not only did this sequence limit the rate at which a single ship could bring fire against its enemy, but the turning movement also made close cooperation with a squadron difficult. It was impossible to concentrate enough weight of shot at any point to achieve decisive results, and naval battles continued to be decided by boarding. In order

OPPOSITE
Detail from *The Panorama of the Battle of Trafalgar* by W. K. Wyllie RA. HMS *Neptune* (right) engages the 130-gun Santísima Trinidad, which later sank. (Royal Naval Museum)

to accommodate larger batteries, ships began to be built longer, which also increased their speed, but reduced their tactical manoeuverability. This both made it possible, and necessary, that ships work together in fleets.

By the end of the 18th century the principal batteries of great ships were armed with smooth bore cannons weighing 6,000 pounds, mounted on a truck with four wheels so that they could recoil, and capable of firing a 32lb (14.5kg) shot. To fire it, the gun loader rammed a flannel bag of black gunpowder down the barrel, followed by the spherical iron ball and a wad to keep it in place, an awl was then driven down through the touch hole at the butt, breaking a hole in the charge bag, and a goose quill filled with fine gunpowder was inserted. By the end of the century the actual firing would be done by a flint-lock which was triggered by a long cord tugged by the gun captain when he considered that the gun would lay on its target. For close action, it was the practice to load two, or even three, balls for the first discharge. Once engaged, however, the confusion of action made it usual to stick to the simplest possible routine to reduce the risk of accidents. The gun was elevated by a wedge, or quoin, placed under the butt, which needed to be hove into position by men employing handspikes. Handspikes were also used to squew the gun truck across the deck to aim it properly through the port. The recoil was stopped by a heavy, and elastic, rope which was fastened to ring bolts at each end and passed round the butt of the gun. The gun would then be sponged out to ensure there was no lingering scrap of the powder bag which might prematurely ignite the next charge, and then it would be reloaded and run back out the gun port by its 13-man crew. Lighter 24-pounder guns were used on the middle and upper gun decks, but they had considerably less penetrating ability. Eighteen-pounder and 9-pounder guns were used as chase guns, and on lighter warships. In the 1770s light-weight, low calibre carronades were introduced into the fleet. Using a smaller charge, these guns could fire the same weight of shot but to a shorter range.

It was possible for a fully worked-up British crew at the end of the 18th century to sustain a rate of independent fire of one round every minute. In 1805 Collingwood's *Dreadnought* was able to deliver three full broadsides every three-and-a-half minutes. When in 1793 Admiral Don Frederico Gravina, briefly an ally of the British, visited Portsmouth dockyard he concluded that British superiority in gunnery was a result of the superiority of the British gun carriage, and the use of the flint-lock for firing. British propellant was also better, due to the East India Company's control of sources of saltpetre. But most important was good gun drill, constant practice and high morale. Victory depended on sustaining an effective rate of fire until the enemy gunners were killed or their weapons disabled. Shot from a 32-pounder could penetrate the heaviest ship timbers at close range, destroy guns, and produce showers of splinters which killed or maimed the men. Guns could be elevated so that shot would burst upwards through the upper decks of the enemy ship. It required a high degree of training to ensure that a gun-crew could continue to work their weapon when subjected to such attack, and to do so safely. The recoil of the guns could kill their own crews if they were not well drilled, and if the rammer failed to sponge out the gun, or lost count and rammed in two charges, premature discharge, or the bursting of the guns, was a real danger.

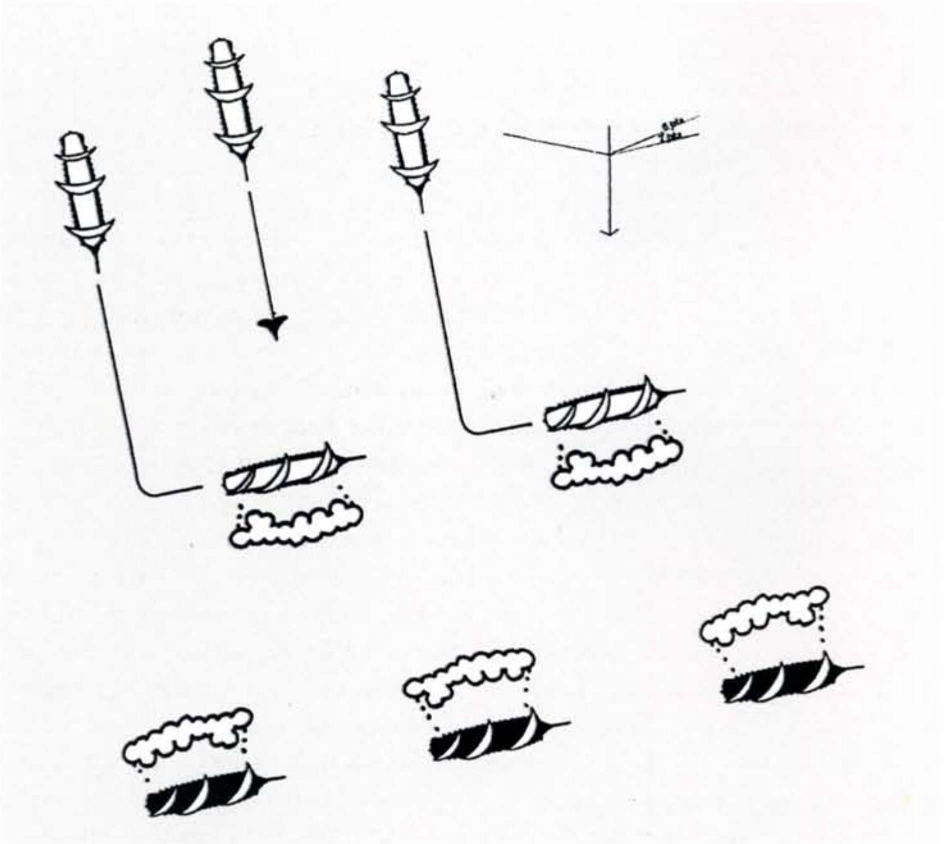
By the time Nelson first went to sea in 1770, the great ships, which had become known as ships of the line because of the tactical formations in which they were employed, had evolved into several distinct classes distinguished by their number of guns. The largest, with 100 guns or more on three gun decks, were considered First Rate ships. The most famous of all was HMS *Victory*, which had been launched in 1765 and was to be Nelson's flagship at Trafalgar. She was 186ft (nearly 57m) long on the gun deck, and displaced 2,142 tons. Her armament at the time of Trafalgar was 30 × 32-pounders, 28 × 24-pounders, 30 × 12-pounders, and 8 × 6-pounders, delivering a broadside of 1,020lb of shot (460kg). Second Rates were three-decked ships with less than 100 guns. By the end of the century they were nearly all armed with 98 guns. The *Prince of Wales* which was launched in 1794, displaced 2010 tons, and threw a broadside of 958lb of shot (453kg). Third Rates at the time of Trafalgar were all two-decked ships, armed with 64, 74 or 80 guns, of which the most numerous were the 74s. The *Centaur* launched in 1797 was rated at 1,842 tons, and had an armament of 28 × 32-pounders, 30 × 24-pounders and 16 × 9-pounders, throwing a broadside of 880lb (400kg).

Before the development of the ship of the line, tactical organization had largely consisted of mutual support, and the earliest fighting instructions were concerned with fleet discipline. Captains had to be restrained from abandoning tactical formations in order to make prizes. They had to be instructed to hold their fire until they were within effective range. And at their peril they were never to fire on the enemy over, or through, a friendly ship. By the mid-17th century, once ships had been developed which mounted batteries capable of defeating an enemy by its firepower alone, it became a matter of necessity to develop fleet tactics which not only would guard against 'friendly fire' mistakes, but would ensure that ships were provided with open arcs so that fleets could deploy their full fire power. From the time of the Second Dutch War the standard tactical formation for the fleets of sailing warships became a close order line of battle ahead. The Battle of Malaga in 1704 established in British and in French tactical thinking the absolute importance of maintaining the defensive strength of a well ordered line of battle. In the Admiralty's signal book of 1799, the advantages of linear tactics were stated to be 'that the ships may be able to assist and support each other in action; that they may not be exposed to the fire of the enemy's ships greater in number than themselves; and that every ship may be able to fire on the enemy without risk of firing into the ships of her own fleet.'[1]

The line of battle, however, had more advantages for the defence than it had for offense. A fleet of ships mounting heavy batteries on their sides, drawn up in close order line-ahead, presented a tremendous weight of fire against the lead ship or ships in an approaching fleet, and could direct their fire at the structurally weak, and lightly armed bows of the leading ships. The attacking fleet could only return fire if ships swung away from the line of advance to present their broadsides. In consequence, the central tactical problem in every battle of the sailing ship era was that of manoeuvring the ships of the line into firing range of the enemy. If the attack were made with line-ahead formation there was a danger that the lead ship would be disabled, and block the advance of the remainder of the line. If the attackers adopted a line-abreast formation and steered directly for the enemy they would cover the distance more rapidly, but all their ships would be highly vulnerable during the approach, and differences in the speed of individual ships could destroy the tactical formation when finally the fleet turned on a course parallel to the enemy.

The tactical problem of how to bring an enemy to action was further complicated by the need for an admiral, who was determined to press home an attack, to bring his fleet onto the same heading as the enemy fleet. If fleets passed each other in opposite directions there was little chance of decisive results. Only by prolonged firing at very close range, no more than a few hundred yards and ultimately at ranges so close that there was a danger of muzzle blast setting both ships on fire, could the heavy sides of a first or second rate ship of the line be subjected to a truly destructive force.

The development of systems of tactical manoeuvre to enable fleets of ships of the line to force decisive battle on their enemies was a result of experience, and



Approaching an enemy line of battle in line abreast exposed the heads of the ships to a fire they could not return. It had the additional problem that ships running before the wind were less able to control their speed because they could not back a sail. When the leading ships turned to fire on the enemy, they would mask the slower ships and break up the tactical formation. (Sarah Petite) theoretical analysis, over the century and a half from the Second Dutch War beginning in 1664 to the wars of the French Revolution and Empire. Successive admirals drafted Sailing and Fighting Instructions, and added to them with 'Additional Instructions', setting out their intended method of making the dangerous approach, and of responding to moves of the enemy. These were consolidated in 1672 or 1673 when a volume was published under the name of James Duke of York containing all the standard signals and instructions.[2] In 1691 Admiral Russell put his name to a reissue of the Fighting Instructions, with a few additions, and his name continued to be attached to what became in fact, but not in law, an official Admiralty publication.

Almost as basic to naval tactics as the line of battle was the practice in the Royal Navy of meeting the enemy in a close hauled line to windward, because an admiral who kept his fleet in line ahead to windward was more likely to be able to control the subsequent encounter with the enemy. This practice was established, virtually as a legal requirement which admirals ignored only at very great risk of serious consequences, in Article 4 of the Fighting Instructions. It was only possible to keep formation seven points (79°) off the wind, or at best for a well-drilled French fleet of the mid-18th century, six points (67°). This limitation restricted the options open to both admirals, and each could seek to exploit the other's mistakes.

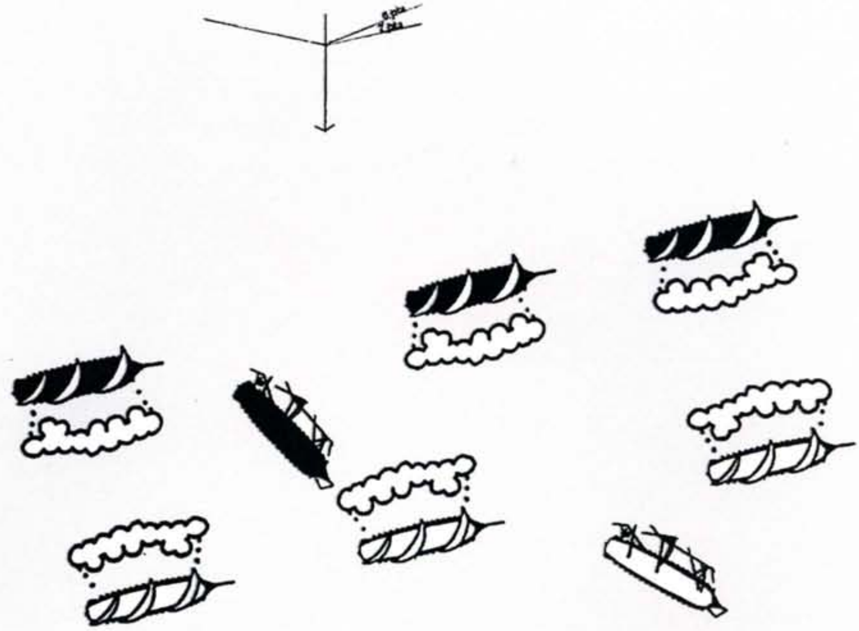
Article 7 instructed the fleet to endeavour to keep to windward of the enemy. A windward position had several advantages, not the least of which was that when the admiral judged it time to close with the enemy the dangerous approach could be made more quickly. Because of the direction of heel imparted by a windward position, gunnery against the enemy hull was more effective for the windward fleet, while the leeward position favoured gunnery against the enemy rigging. In any case, the leeward fleet was more likely to seek to disable the enemy's mobility. The leeward position had defensive advantages, because disabled ships would tend to drift into safety behind their own line, but for that very reason the windward position had psychological value because it gave 'shy' captains little chance to shirk their duty.

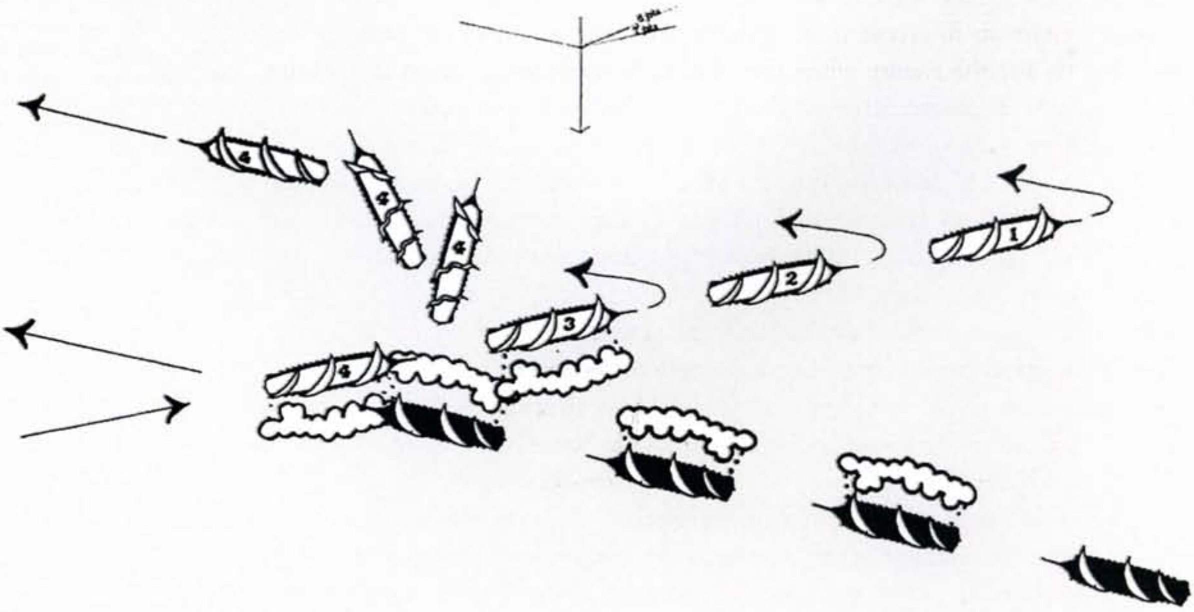
Article 8 instructed the leading squadron to steer for the leading ships of the enemy fleet. Should it be necessary to reverse the fleet to bring the enemy to action on the same tack, Article 1 established the principle that the rear ships of the line should be the first to begin the deployment.[3]

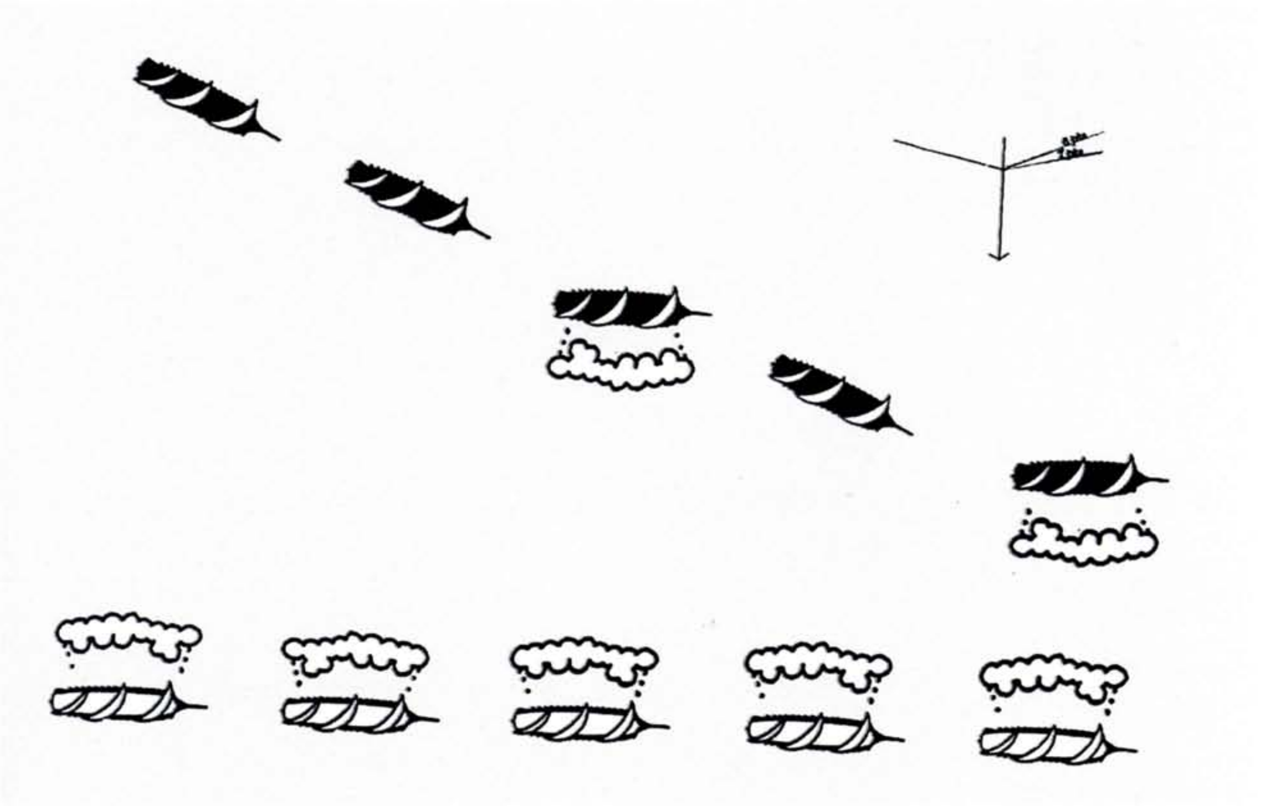
Attack from the windward was not without difficulties. When Lord Dartmouth issued instructions to the fleet assembled in 1688 to prevent a landing by William of Orange he planned to make a long approach at an oblique angle to the enemy wake. The idea was to expose his ships' heads as little as possible to a fire they could not return. Progress was to be controlled by the captains conforming to the movements of the flagship. From time to time, as appeared necessary, the ships were to swing round so that they could open fire on the enemy ships ahead of them. Then the admiral would bear down again with his ships taking their cue from his movements. When nearly within gunshot

RIGHT
The leeward position had the defensive advantage that damaged ships would tend to drift behind their own line and into safety. The windward line was more vulnerable, but was better able to force action on the enemy. (Sarah Petite)

BELOW
Decisive action depended on protracted firing, for which fleets needed to be on nearly the same course. It was standard British practice in the event of successfully winning a race for the windward position, to sail the length of the enemy, and then to tack onto its course, with the last ship turning first to avoid the complex procedure of tacking disrupting tactical formation. (Sarah Petite)



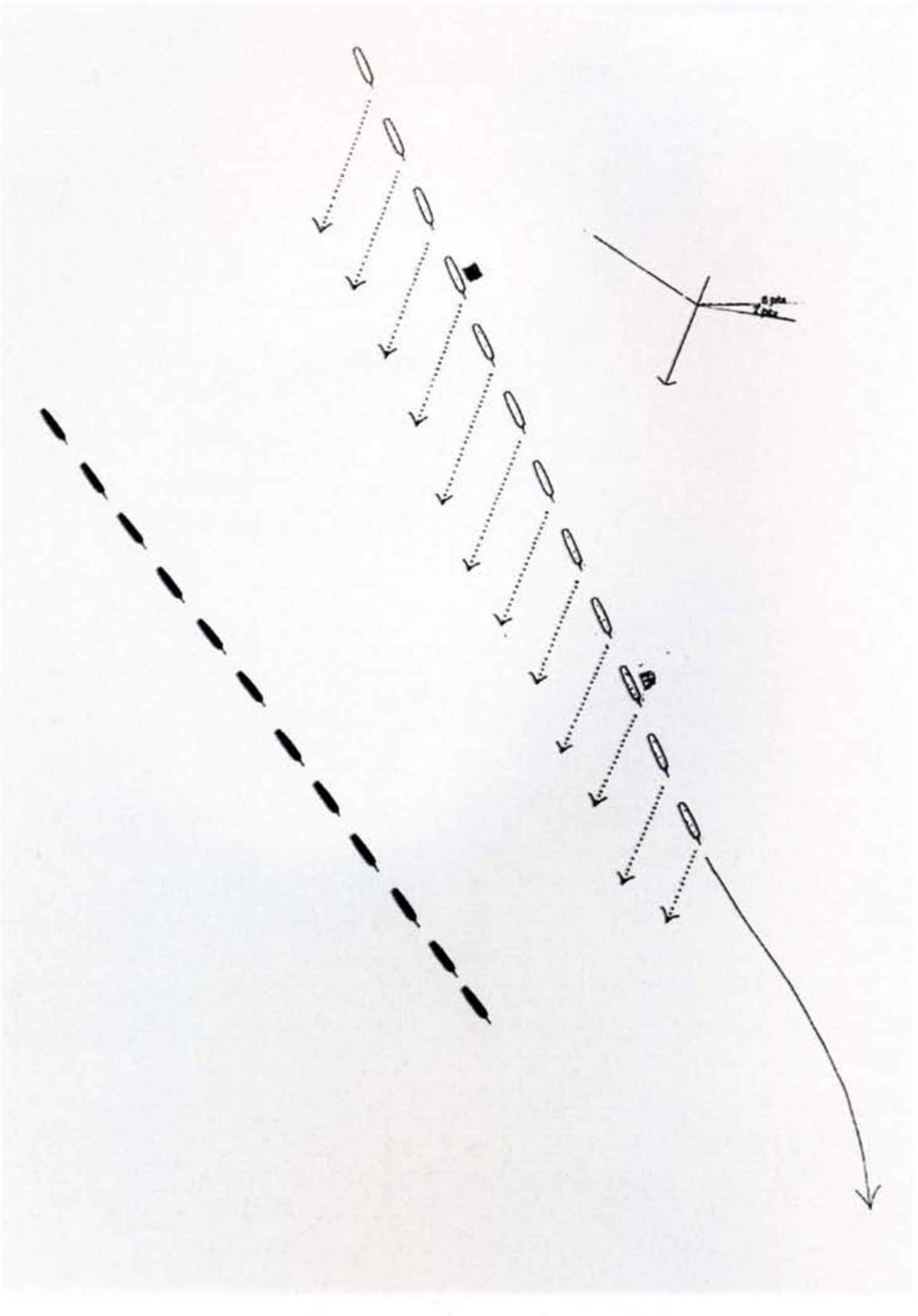




An oblique approach from windward required skilful ship handling if ships were to fire on the enemy without impeding the progress of the ships in their wakes. (Sarah Petite)

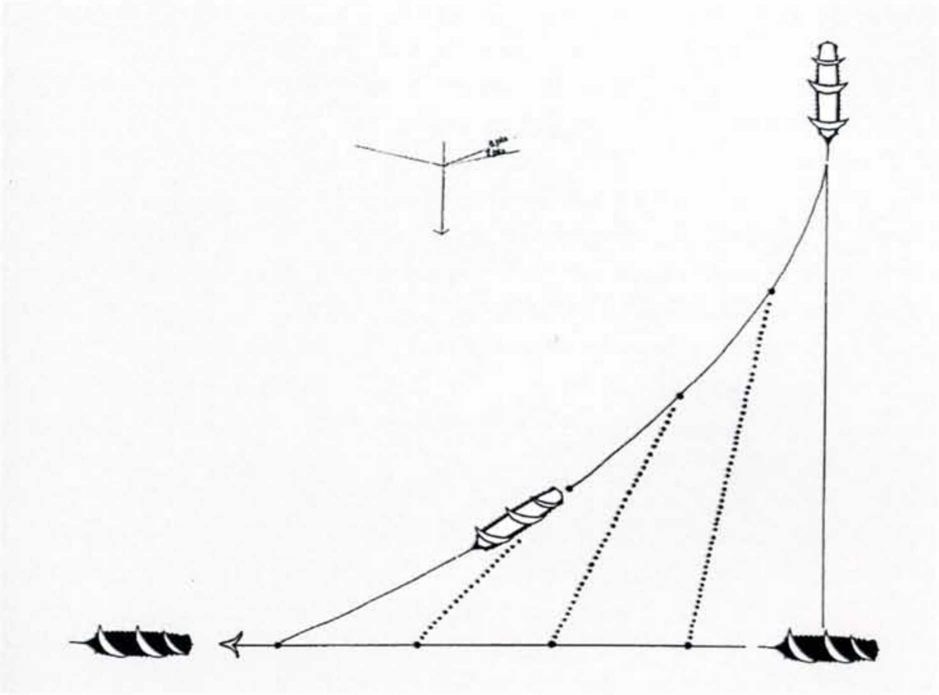
of the enemy, the ships were to 'lask away,' taking the wind on their quarters and steering courses to intercept their opposite number. At no point were they to head directly for the enemy when they would be exposed head-on to a raking fire.[4] Given the disparate nature of the English fleet at the time, this tactical plan may have been somewhat fanciful. It was to be attempted by Admiral Byng in 1756 at the Battle of Minorca, but he failed because his leading captain did not understand what was expected of him. Unless the attacking fleet had a useful speed advantage over the enemy it was inevitable that the approach would degrade into a stern chase.

The admiral's task was not finished by getting his fleet into firing range. Decisive victory depended upon concentration of the fire on a part of the enemy line. British 32-pounder long guns were capable of a range of 2,900yds (about 2650m), but battles were not fought at that range because the kinetic energy of the shot would be so diminished that its capacity to penetrate heavy timbering would be greatly reduced. Furthermore, too much of the shot would be wasted by falling into the sea, because of the inaccuracy of the gun, and because its elevation system did not permit continuous laying of the guns to compensate for the rolling of the ship. It was necessary for gunners to judge the precise point in the ship's roll to pull the firing cord, and the difficulty was greatly increased if the gun were elevated. Point-blank range of 350yds (about 320m), when no elevation was required, was considered maximum battle range, and the effectiveness of fire

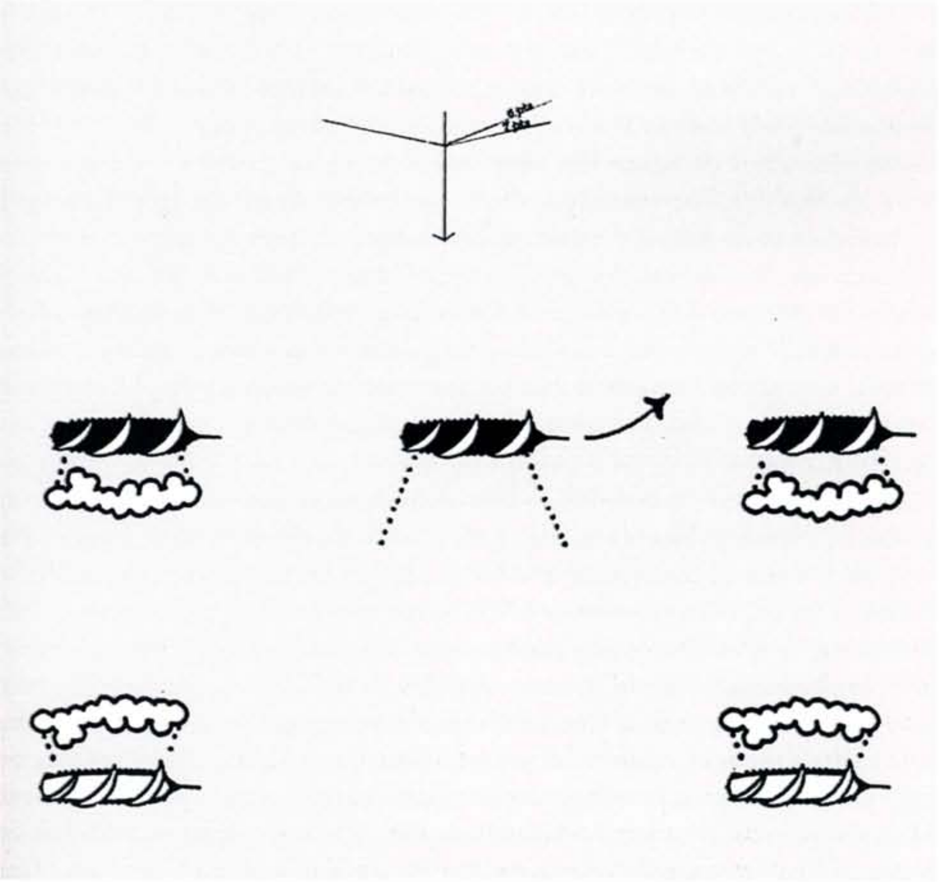


At the battle of Minorca Admiral Byng ordered his fleet to 'lask' down on the enemy line, but the leading ship mistook his order and sailed to intercept the leading ship of the enemy. (Sarah Petite)

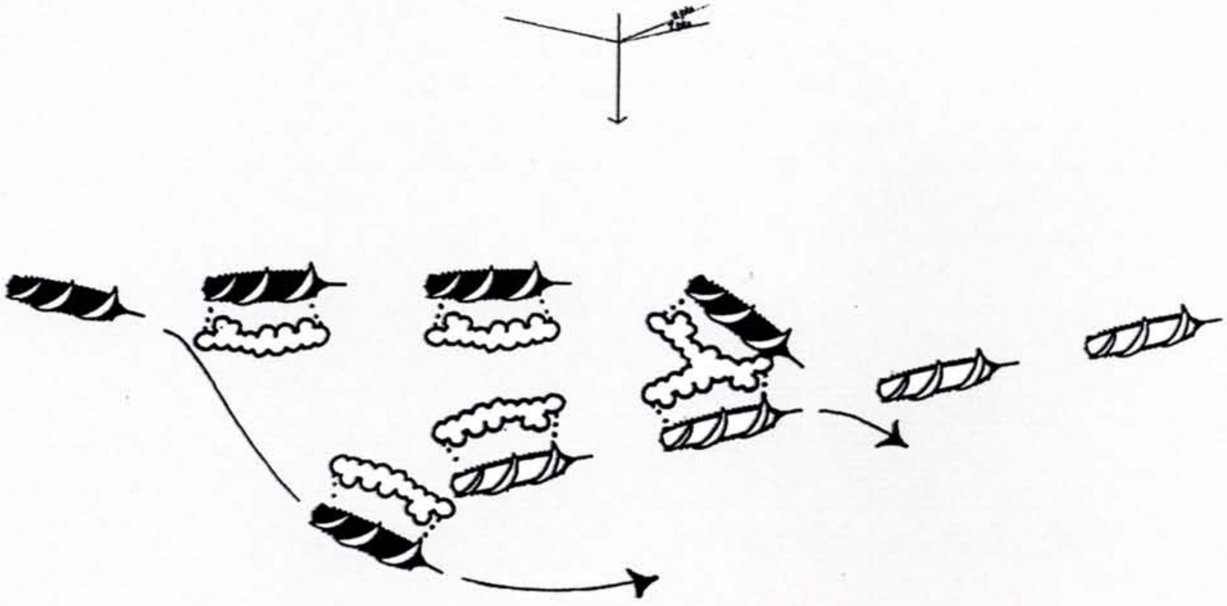
could be increased by using double shot at a range of only 100yds (about 91m).[5] As was demonstrated in 1782 by the first British civilian student of tactics, John Clerk of Eldin, in *An Essay on Naval Tactics*, ships moving in line-ahead and a cable from each other, unless one of them swung out of line, could only fire on the same target if the enemy were over 720 yards away. With the longer-range guns which came into service in the late 19th century, concentration could be achieved by directing the fire of widely separated ships onto a single target. That



As John Clerk of Eldin demonstrated in 1782, a head on attack from windward tended to become a stern chase. (Sarah Petite)



Clerk of Eldin also showed that ships in a fleet making way could only fire on the next ahead or astern in the enemy line while holding its course if the fleets were over 750 yards apart. Inside that range, if a ship in the windward fleet had no opposite number, it could only fire on the enemy by bearing up, which could put it 'in irons' making stern way, and disrupting the tactical formation. (Sarah Petite)



Crushing firepower could only be managed by 'doubling' the enemy line, from the rear or van, or by cutting the enemy line. (Sarah Petite)

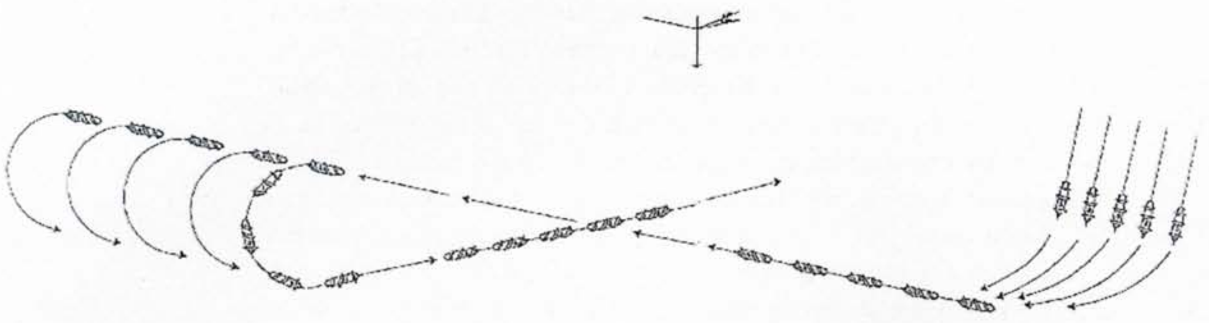
was not possible with the short-range weapons available to Nelson. The only way an admiral could hope to bring concentrated fire against a part of the enemy line at ranges as short as 350 to 100 yards was to bring the enemy line between two fires, by 'doubling' the enemy line in the van or rear by detaching ships to pass around the van or rear of the enemy, or by cutting through the line.

To do so, without compromising the defensive strength of his own line, it would be necessary for an admiral confronting an enemy of equal strength to space out his own line so as to release forces for the enveloping movement. The thinned line might be able to contain the enemy because of the difficulty the latter would experience in employing its unengaged ships without disrupting his tactical movement.

So difficult was it to conform to best tactical practice and still force battle on a reluctant foe that there was a strong 'go at'em' school in the Royal Navy which thought it better to throw away the book, take your knocks, and close with the enemy. Admiral Vernon wrote in 1739: 'Our sea officers despise theory … and by trusting only to their genius at the instant they are to act, have neither time, nor foundation whereby to proceed.' Vernon did not wholly disapprove of the anti-intellectual approach. 'Where officers are determined to fight in great fleets, 'tis much of the least of the matter what order they fight in… All formality … only tends to keep the main point out of the question, and to give knaves and fools an opportunity to justify themselves on the credit of jargon and nonsense.'[6] Nelson's mentor, Admiral John Jervis, Earl St Vincent, was to observe that 'two fleets of equal strength can never produce decisive events, unless they are equally determined to fight it out or the Commander-in-chief of one of them so bitches it as to misconduct his line.'[7] And he expostulated that 'Lord Hawke when he ran out of the line [at the Battle of Toulon] and took the *Poder* sickened me of tactics.'[8] Part of Nelson's genius lay in his ability to judge just how far he could depart from tactical conventions in order to get decisive, yet successful, action.

Admirals continued to struggle to draft Additional Instructions but these began to change in character by the end of the 18th century, because the need for tactical flexibility and delegation of responsibility was increasingly recognized. During his brief period in command of the Channel Fleet during the Seven Years' War, Admiral Anson issued an instruction that, should he find that not enough of his ships were able to engage the enemy while maintaining line discipline, he would haul down the signal for the line. Every ship was then to engage the ship opposite it in the enemy line.[9] The next year Rear-Admiral Hawke amplified the same instruction when he took over command.[10] In 1747 Hawke issued a set of additional instructions which were intended to increase the flexibility of line tactics by giving the admiral more control over manoeuvre, and also by trusting individual captains to make appropriate decisions.[11] Hawke's Article 8 instructed the captains of the smaller ships, if the fleet were in action with a less numerous enemy force, to fall out of the line on their own initiative and manoeuvre to rake the enemy van or rear. His Articles 9 and 10 permitted more initiative to individual captains, in the particular circumstance of the pursuit of an enemy fleet which was unwilling to give battle.

It was recognized practice to give each ship a pre-assigned position in each squadron's line of battle.[12] This was necessary because fleets were made up of ships with differing weight of timber and gun, and commanded by officers with different degrees of capacity. No navy could afford to build all its ships of the largest rate, because they had to be constructed from the largest trees, which were relatively scarce. Furthermore, admirals needed battle-lines with roughly the same number of ships as those of their enemy so as to limit the danger of being overwhelmed by concentrations of force. These numbers could only be achieved by compromising on ship size and made it necessary for admirals to organize their lines so as to ensure the most capable ships with the most reliable captains were put where they would do most good. But deployment from order of sailing to order of battle could take so long that the enemy would have time to retreat. And the line of battle once formed could only advance at the speed of the slowest of the ships from which it was composed. The signal ordering 'general chase,' which permitted ships to leave the order of battle to pursue the enemy, was only suitable if the enemy force were disorganized. To address these problems, Hawke, or Anson, introduced the idea of an emergency line of battle which would be formed by the captains of the faster ships as they came up with the enemy, the furthest advanced taking the lead without regard to seniority. This *ad hoc* line was to engage the rearward ships of the enemy, and try to pass on to the enemy van.



The fleet on the right is in 'Bow and Quarter' formation, with its axis seven points off the wind, allowing it to turn together into a close hauled line ahead on the starboard tack. Subsequently the ships wear, beginning with the rearmost, and form a close hauled line on the port tack. (Sarah Petite)

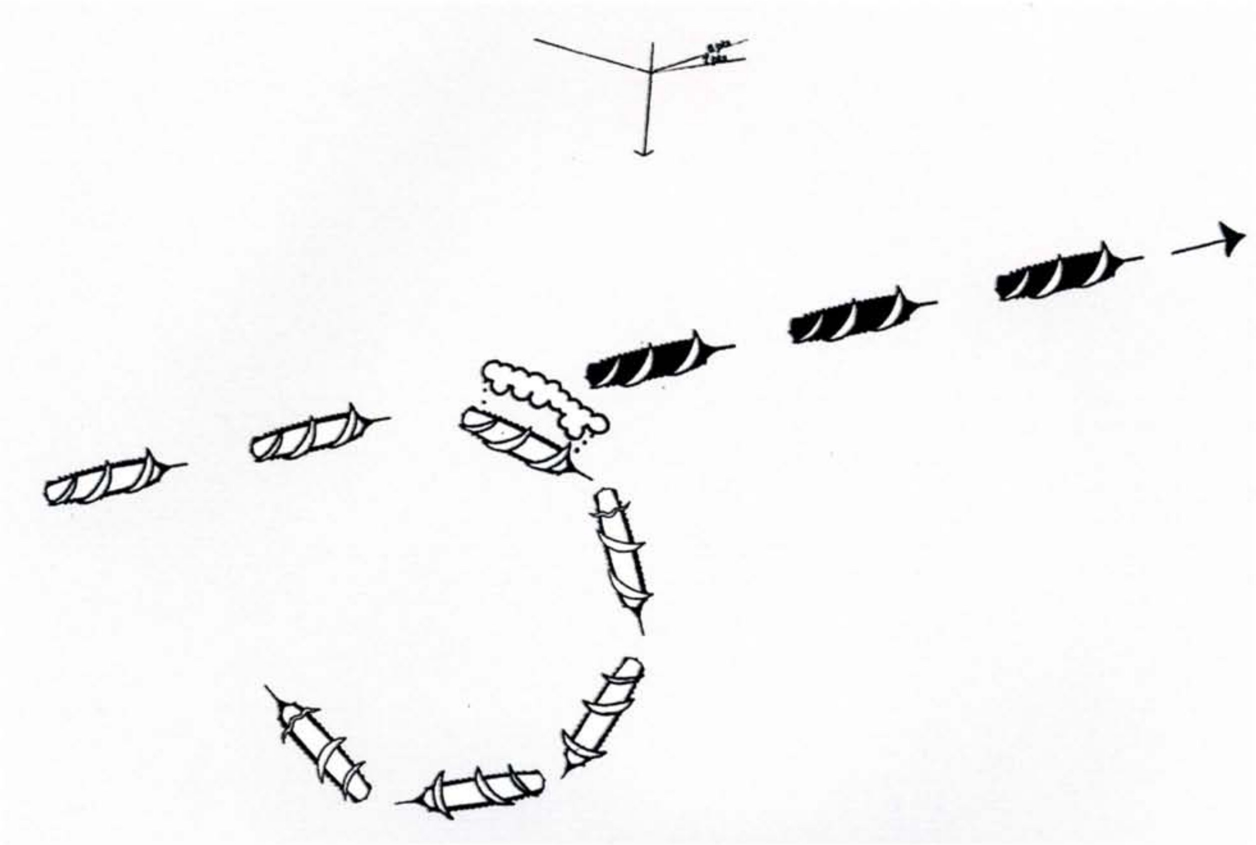
Anson also introduced into British tactics the Line of Bearing Formation, or the 'Bow and Quarter Line.' This was identical to the 'First Order of Sailing' which the French mathematician Pierre Paul Hoste had devized from abstract thinking about tactical problems, and published in 1697 in one of the great books of naval tactics, *L'Art des Armées Navales ou Traité des Evolutions Navales*. As with the later versions of Hoste's order, the axis of the formation could be any bearing ordered by the admiral, but the usual practice was to have the axis seven points off the wind, so that on the order being given the fleet could turn together into a close-hauled line ahead. The term 'Starboard' or 'Larboard (Port) Line of Bearing' was used to indicate lines of bearing which could be made into a close-hauled line to windward on the starboard or port tack by ordering the ships to change course. Until that order was given, the course set for the fleet could be anything the wind permitted. If it was wanted to change the line of bearing, as opposed to the ships heading, it was usually necessary to deploy into line ahead, and pay off on the new bearing, before returning to the intended heading.

The process of tactical reform was accelerated during the American Revolutionary war, notably by Lord Howe when he arrived in New York in 1776 to assume command of the North American Station. Howe's fleet was engaged in operations against the American rebels, but he took the opportunity to organize it for battle, and provided it with a *Signal Book For Ships of War* which was such an important development on standard British practice that it eventually became the model for official publication.[13] He believed strongly in the importance of a well ordered line of battle, and he renewed the ban on individual captains breaking the line to pursue individual ships of the enemy. His conservatism is revealed in his direction to his subordinate flag officers to engage their opposite numbers in the enemy line. But he also instructed the captains of ships which found that they could not keep up with the fleet to drop out of the line: 'The Captains of such ships will not be thereby left in a situation less at liberty to distinguish themselves; as they will have an opportunity to render essential service, by placing their ships to advantage when arrived up with the enemy, already engaged with the other part of the fleet.' To place such trust in individual captains was most innovative, and gives Howe a strong claim to have sewn the seeds which, under Jervis, and then Nelson, transformed the navy into 'the band of brothers' that won the battle of the Nile, and went on to win the battles of Copenhagen and Trafalgar.

Howe made provision for the eventuality that irregularities in the enemy line might make it desirable to permit his captains greater latitude in their station keeping. On the signal being made, individual captains were to continue to steer for those ships which in the sequence of the line ought to be their lot, making as little change of course as possible so that they would gradually work into position to engage without either exposing their own ship too greatly, or creating difficulties for the ships astern of them. They were free to engage from windward or leeward as they thought fit. He also issued instructions for two tactical deployments against the rearmost ships of a fleeing fleet, designed to force the enemy admiral to come about to protect his rear. In one variant the British leading ships were to turn away after firing so that the succeeding ships could take their place, and in the other the leading British ship was to lay along side the rearmost ship of the enemy, while the second British ship was to pass on the disengaged side and lay alongside the enemy second from the rear. In this way, the British line would be gradually inverted.

At the same time that Howe, and Rear-Admiral Richard Kempenfelt, were groping their way towards a new system of signals and tactics for the Royal Navy, other British admirals were continuing to issue additional instructions. In 1780 Admiral Rodney issued *Signals and Instructions in Addition* which included a signal ordering 'all the three-decked and heavy ships [to] draw out of their places in the line of battle and form in the van [or rear] of the fleet.'[14] It may have been the origin of Nelson's decision when planning for Trafalgar to place his flag-officers at the head of the columns where the heavier timbering of their first rate flag ships could absorb the punishment the leading ships would inevitably suffer. At the head of his column, Nelson was also in the best position to direct the attack. Most important of all, however, was the psychological necessity that he place himself in the position of most danger.

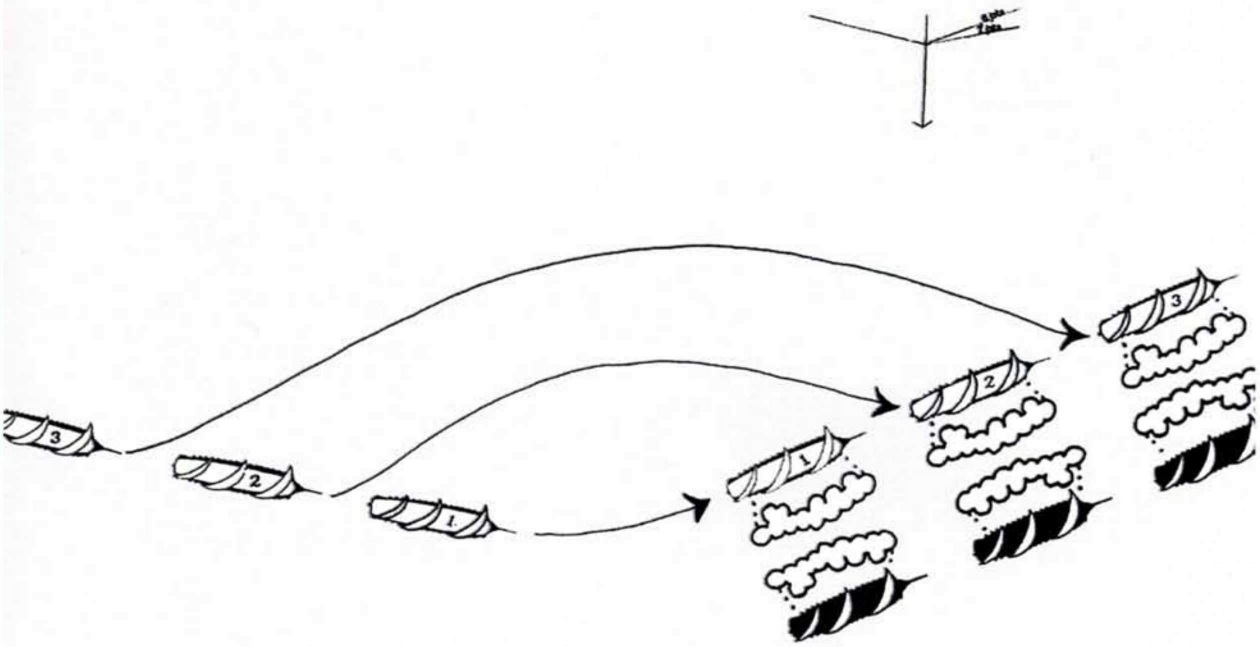
In April 1782 Rodney and de Grasse fought the last great battle of the American Revolutionary War, near the islets known as the Saints north of Dominica. The battle was technically interesting because the British fleet, for the first time since the Dutch Wars in a major fleet action, cut the enemy line. The tactical movement which effected this, Rodney taking the Centre squadron through a gap in the French line, was probably unpremeditated, and led to captains ahead and astern of the flag taking similar action. St Vincent was convinced that 'Lord Rodney passed through the enemy's line by accident.'[15] Rodney was presented with the opportunity to undertake the action because the enemy fleet had become disorganized in the gun smoke, and he could take



Admiral Howe's methods of attacking the rear of a fleeing enemy fleet, by firing in succession and turning away, or **(OPPOSITE)** by inverting the order of the line as each ship engages the rearmost disengaged ship of the enemy. (Sarah Petite)

advantage of the accident without undue risk because he was conscious of the moral ascendence the British fleet had already gained. As they passed through the French, their gunners were ready to fire into the vulnerable bows and sterns of the ships on either side of the break, and then they were able to hold some of the French between two fires. Their success was a valuable lesson for the future.

Article 3 of the Fighting Instructions had long since established that, if a fleet were forced into the leeward position, it was to attempt to cut the enemy line and so pass through to the windward side. But this had been considered almost as an act of desperation, and as late as the mid-18th century there was no signal in the Fighting Instructions which called for it. The notion that it could be easier to force a general action from the leeward position, and that the best way to do so was by cutting through the enemy line, was published by Clerk of Eldin in 1782. Rodney evidently thought that Clerk had got it right when he emphasized the importance of concentrating force against a part of the enemy line, noting in his own copy of Clerk's *An Essay on Naval Tactics* that 'during all the commands Lord Rodney has been intrusted with he made it a rule to bring his whole force against part of the enemy's and never was so absurd as to bring ship against ship, when the enemy gave him an opportunity of acting otherwise.'[16] The difficulty of forcing a general action from leeward, however, was greater than Clerk acknowledged. As soon as the leeward fleet bore up to close the enemy line it was bound to lose



speed. Its exposure to raking fire would be protracted, and there was great probability that by the time it reached the position once occupied by the enemy fleet, it would find itself passing ineffectually across its rear. In a crossing movement such as had happened at the Saints, close action could be less problematic, but in fact it had only occurred as a result of de Grasse's clumsy handling of his fleet. In any case, crossing actions rarely produced decisive results.

Howe's tactical instructions for the Nootka Sound crisis of 1790 were little changed from those he had issued to the American station early in the American War, but he addressed the problem of bring the French to close action, and holding them, by issuing a new signal, number 34, which was to be used 'If when having the Weather Gage of the Enemy the Admiral means to pass between the ships in their line for engaging them to leeward.' This manoeuvre would combine the advantages of the windward position for forcing action on the enemy, and the leeward for preventing them escaping once engaged. It is unclear whether Howe's intent was to make the approach in line of bearing, and so break the enemy line in more than one place. That was what he attempted to do at the battle of The Glorious First of June in 1794, but he tried then to convey his meaning by employing another signal, number 36, indicating that every ship was to steer for her opposite number and engage her. The result confused his fleet, and when the Admiralty reissued the signal in 1799 as its new number 27 it

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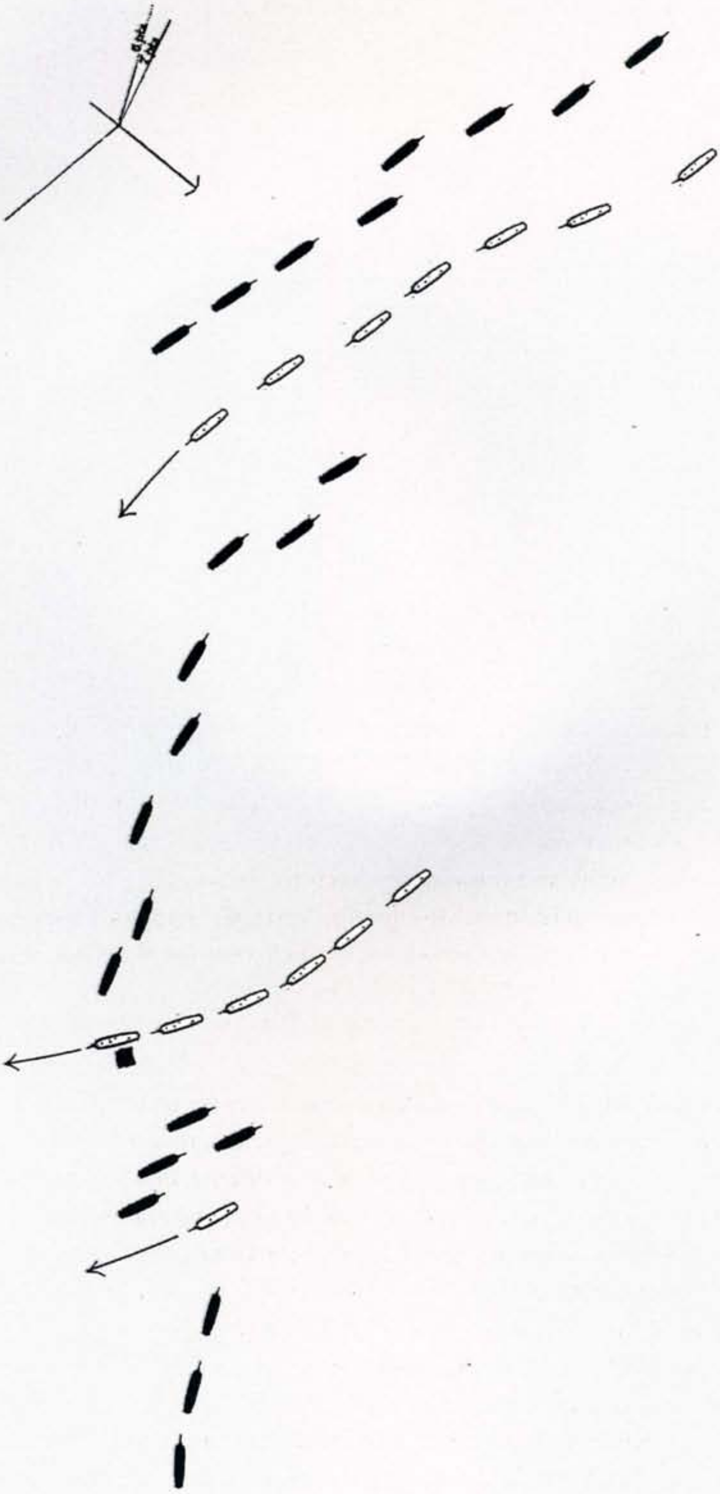
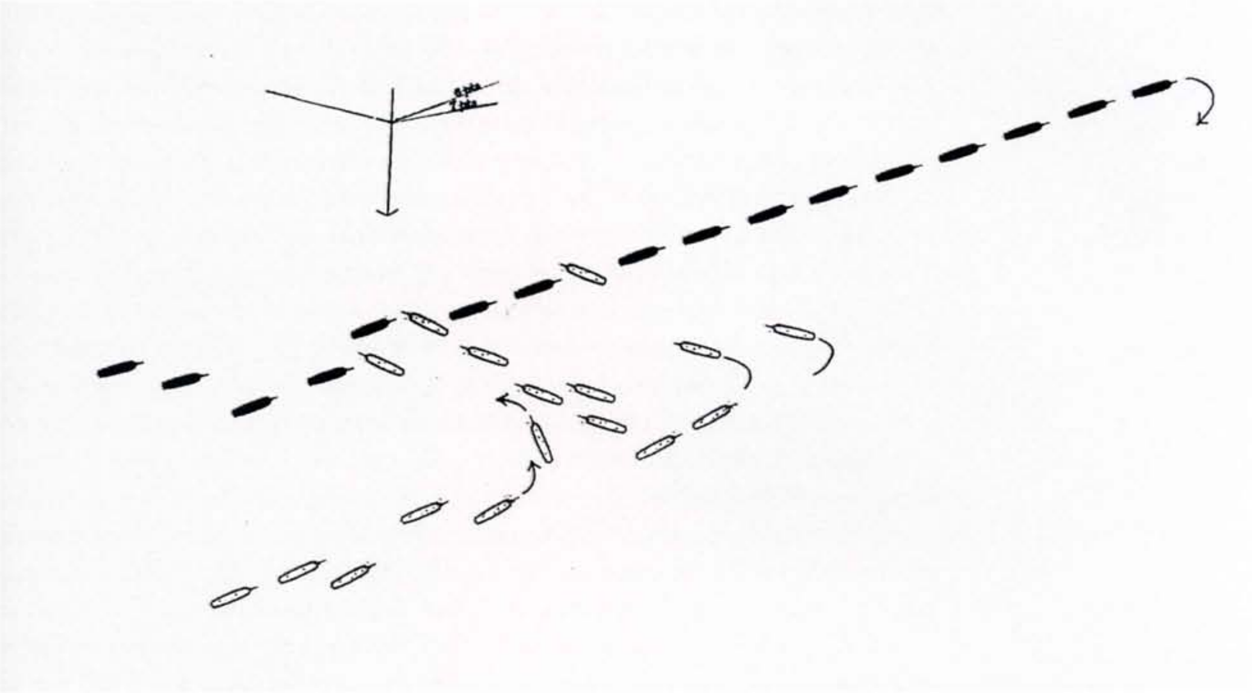
Admiral Rodney's cutting the enemy line from the leeward at the Battle of the Saints in 1782. (Sarah Petite)





Admiral Howe's cutting the enemy line from the leeward at the Battle of the Glorious First of June, in 1794. (Sarah Petite)

specifically directed captains to 'Break through the enemy's line in all parts where it is practicable, and engage on the other side.' Unfortunately, the Admiralty then contributed its own confusion by using the same signal, with the addition of a blue pendant, to order the fleet in close order line-ahead to cut through the enemy in one place only, and presumably from the leeward.[17]

The latitude Howe permitted his captains certainly had its limits, and the numerical signalling system he introduced, which enabled the fleet to employ more sophisticated tactics, also enabled admirals to exert more control.[18] It employed a hoist of two flags to signify digits and tens, with a pendant for the hundreds. Ten numerical flags were required, and substitute pendants for repeating numbers, as well as for the hundreds. The use of pendants overcame the problem of distinguishing a hoist of three flags. In this way most three-digit numbers could be signalled, using flags and pendants flown from whatever position in the rigging they could best be seen. Each paragraph in the sailing and fighting instructions was numbered. The great advantages of converting signals into numbers were the speed with which they could be read, and the ease with which new signals could be incorporated. It was also easier to change signals if there was a risk that the enemy had obtained a copy of the signal book. The adoption of a signalling system which enabled the flags and pendants to be flown from the best position for them to be seen, rather than the older system which required flags to be flown from particular parts of the rigging, had obvious tactical advantages. On the other hand, the three-flag hoists were relatively difficult to distinguish at a distance. A supplementary system of 'distance signals' had to be devised. These used a limited number of flags and shapes which were flown from the fore, main, and mizzen mastheads. They were slower to use, but could be read at ranges which made it difficult to distinguish colours. It was by this method that Nelson received the signal that the enemy were leaving Cadiz on the eve of Trafalgar. Nelson was also able to make use of a supplementary signalling system devised by Admiral Popham following his experience off Copenhagen in 1800 when he used numerical signals to refer to words in a dictionary. This, for the first time, enabled an admiral to send signals in plain language which he had not previously issued in writing.

Earlier, during the American War, Howe had provided the fleet with a system of night signals for frigates on reconnaissance which gave Nelson the means of maintaining a continuous observation of the enemy in Cadiz in the days before Trafalgar.[19] The frigates engaged in the service were to carry distinguishing lights so placed that they could be seen by the fleet off-shore, but not by the enemy. They were to be especially careful to display their lights if the enemy were seen to be drawing towards or away from the fleet. This set of signals was reissued when Howe assumed command of the Channel Fleet in 1782, and became a permanent feature of all his future additional instructions.

The tactics Nelson used at Trafalgar benefited from the experience of Rodney and Howe, and from the use made of the new ideas by Admiral Jervis, Earl St Vincent, and by Admiral Duncan. When Jervis encountered the Spanish fleet on St Valentines day 1797 off Cape St Vincent, he profited by the new ideas in tactics when he did deliberately what Rodney had done accidentally, and steered to divide the Spanish line from to leeward. And when the manoeuvre orders he gave his fleet proved inadequate to prevent the Spaniards reuniting their line, Nelson as a senior captain broke with the older tradition of slavish obedience in a manner Howe might have approved and which Jervis did later endorse, using his initiative to wear out of line and block the Spanish movement. When in October of the same year Duncan met the Dutch fleet, he ordered his fleet to attack in line abreast, pass through the Dutch line, and prevent their escape to leeward, the tactic Howe had attempted at the First of June. Nelson's attack in two columns at Trafalgar to punch through the Franco-Spanish line from to windward and prevent their escape to leeward was no more than a variant on the tactics used by his brother admirals, tactics which were intended to overcome the limitations inherent in ships of the line, armed with short-ranged smooth-bore cannon.

Nevertheless, although the evolving tactical tradition of the Royal Navy was implicit in the tactics Nelson employed for the battle off Cape Trafalgar, it can also be said that he was building on his own tactical experience, even though Trafalgar was the first battle Nelson commanded in which his enemy was free to manoeuvre. At the battle of the Nile in 1798 his major contribution to the victory was the moral confidence he had imparted to his captains in the months he had known them, which inspired the initiative they showed in carrying out a ruthless and precipitant action in the gathering darkness close to shoals and the Egyptian coast. At Copenhagen in 1801 Nelson was able to provide his captains with detailed written orders for a more methodical action against the moored

Danish fleet, but he also set his captains a standard of complete commitment to the task which inspired their devoted support. Central to this conception was the belief that close mutual support, efficient ship handling, and good gunnery, were more important than good station keeping and fleet manoeuvre. His tactics emphasized momentum and morale in precisely the same way as was seen in the infantry tactics of the French Revolutionary army under the command of Napoleon's marshals. Napoleon won battle after battle in this way, until his columns came up against a well disciplined line of British regular infantry. Nelson's tactics would similarly have been defeated by a skilful French admiral commanding a fleet of the pre-revolutionary Marine, but that was not the enemy Nelson faced at Trafalgar. His tactics were suited to the occasion; especially to his knowledge of the professional abilities and morale of his fleet and that of his enemy. Had he realized, however, that Admiral Villeneuve was determined to fight if he could not get clean away, he might have given his fleet more time to get into order for mutual support. The battle was bitterly fought, and technically his tactics proved less than perfect, but at their heart was the inspiration of a determined leader who trusted and consulted with his captains, and it was that which carried the day.

CHAPTER SIX

HMS *VICTORY*

PETER GOODWIN

Preserved at Portsmouth today, the *Victory* is the only surviving warship that fought during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. As a first rate 100-gun ship of the line, *Victory* was, in her day, the most formidable fighting machine, encompassing all the technical advances of the developing industrial age. Primarily a manoeuvrable floating gun battery, she could deliver a single broadside weight of over half a ton of iron at an opponent.

Victory's story starts in December 1758 when Parliament voted funding to build more ships to supplement the fleet during the Seven Years' War (1756–63). A formal order to build 12 ships was submitted by the Navy Board on 6 June 1759.[1]

Yet unnamed, this 100-gun ship was designed by Sir Thomas Slade, Surveyor of the Navy 1755–71. Perhaps the most notable warship designer of the 18th century, Slade was an innovative man who introduced vast improvements in ship design. Ignoring the conservative views of the Navy Board and working directly in collaboration with Admiral Lord Anson, Slade with his kinsman, Benjamin Slade, assistant master shipwright at Plymouth, based much of his improvements on the careful analysis of captured French ships.

Under the supervision of Master Shipwright John Lock, her keel was laid down in the Old Single Dock at the Royal Dockyard at Chatham, Kent, 23 July 1759. The year 1759, the *Annus Mirabilis*, or 'marvellous year', was the turning point of the war for Britain: victories had been won at Quebec, Minden, Lagos and Quiberon Bay. These facts may well have been instrumental to the Admiralty officially authorizing that Lock's ship be named *Victory* on 30 October 1760. When Lock died in 1762, construction work was completed by his successor, Edward Allin. Although it was intended to complete the ship within 30 months, in 1763 the Treaty of Paris ended the war, thus the rate of work on *Victory* was reduced. Completed after six years, *Victory* was launched 7 May 1765. Her overall cost was £63,176. 3s. 0d, amounting to £4,524,665 at the time of writing.[2]

OPPOSITE
HMS *Victory*'s mainmast soars into the sky. The quality of her restoration and her status as a serving warship testifies to the fact that something of Trafalgar remains very much alive. (By kind permission of the Commanding Officer of HMS *Victory*)

In all, some 6,000 trees had been expended in her construction which at 50 cubic feet per load, or tree, relates to 300,000 cubic feet of timber before conversion into specific ship components. Collectively these 6,000 trees, many aged between 80 and 120 years, would have been cut down from 100 acres of land. Ninety per cent of this quantity of timber was oak; the selected curved or 'compass' oak being used for her stempost, futtocks, frames, knees, breasthooks and deckhooks and so on. Because of her size, the sternpost was made from one single oak tree. While most of this oak was taken from the Wealden forests of Kent and Sussex, some of the straight oak used for her beams, external planking and internal longitudinal strengtheners, may have been imported from Dantzig, modern Gdansk. Sussex oak was considered the best wood for shipbuilding. Oak was also used for the planking of the main, or lower gun deck. Six baulks of elm some 25ft long and 21in. square in cross section were bolted and scarphed together to form her keel, and because of its properties elm was also used for the lower hull planking. Fir, lighter in weight, was used for the planking of the upper decks and bulkheads – the walls that divided the ship into compartments.[3]

As the Seven Years' War, for which she had been built, ended in 1763, *Victory* was laid up in 'ordinary' (reserve) for 13 years before she was commissioned for active sea service in 1778 to fight in the War of American Independence.[4]

Commissioned in February 1778, *Victory* became the flagship of Admiral Keppel. On 23 July Keppel fought an indecisive battle against D'Orvillier's French fleet off Ushant. For the next three years she served as flagship for Admirals Hardy, Geary, Drake and Parker.[5]

To comply with new legislation, the *Victory* was docked in March 1780 and sheathed with copper plating to combat ship-worm, *teredo navalis*, and marine growth. This innovation also improved her speed. In all, the hull was sheathed with approximately 3,923 copper plates, each measuring 4ft (1.22m) in length and 14in. (35.56cm) in width. Plating came in two sizes according to where it was applied: 28oz (0.79kg) and 32oz (0.91kg) per square foot. In all, each of the thinner plates weighed in total a little over 8lb (3.5kg) each, while the heavier plates weighed 9⅓lb (4.2kg). The sheathing plates were nailed to the hull planking with copper nails 1in. (3.8cm) long and quarter of an inch (6.4mm) in diameter. On average each plate was held with 140 nails, thus the total used was approximately 549,220.[6]

The year 1781 saw the *Victory* under the flag of Admiral Kempenfelt who, on 13 December fell in with a French fleet off Ushant. The French, bound from Brest to the West Indies, were escorting a convoy of troopships. Though Kempenfelt's squadron was numerically inferior, he captured the entire convoy from under the escort's noses. Flying the flag of Admiral Howe, in October 1782, *Victory* was in action off Cape Spartel and the Relief of Gibraltar. After the war, the ship was refitted in March 1783 at a cost of £15,372, 19s. 9d. At this stage her quarter-deck armament was modified, the 6-pounder guns being replaced with 12-pounders. Her sides, previously painted 'bright' with rosin above the lower-deck ports were now painted a dull yellow ochre. The area below remained painted black. In 1787

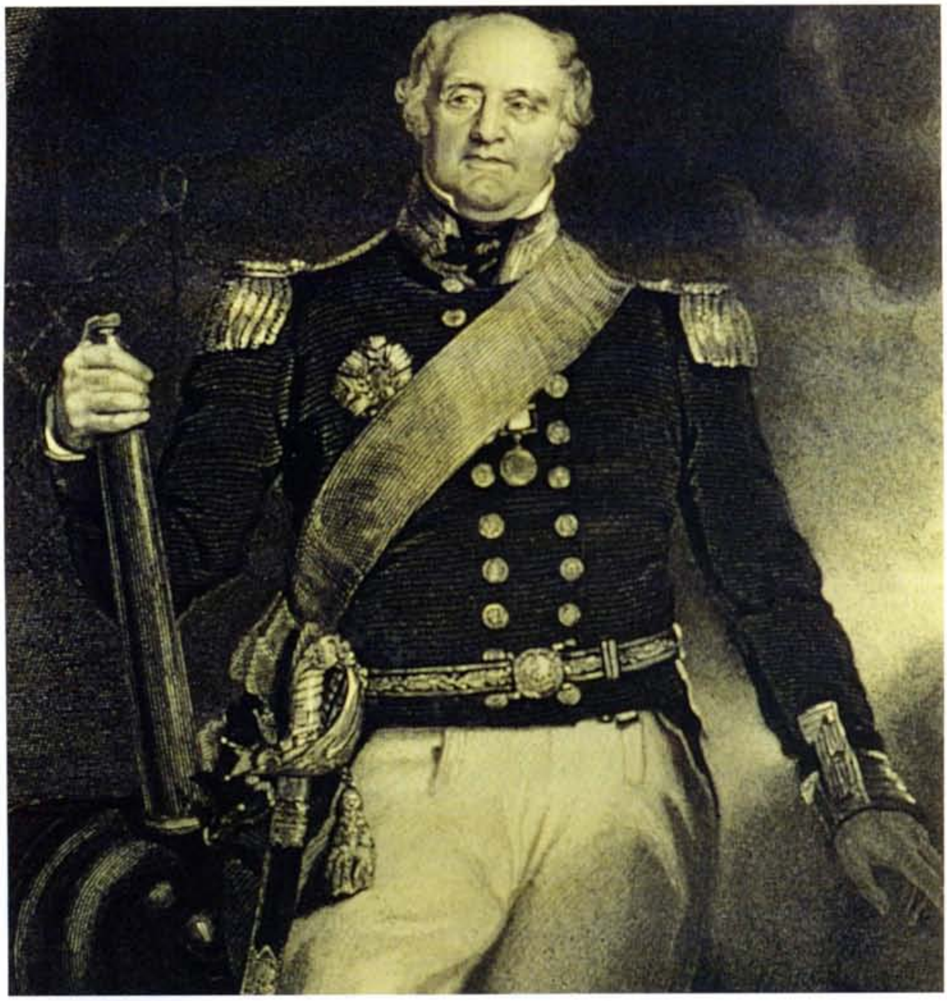
ITEM	IMP. TONS	METRIC TONNES
Estimated total weight of 3923 copper plates	15.30	15.05
Estimated weight of nails @ 0.16 oz (4.5 g) each	2.43	2.39
Total weight	17.73	17.45

she underwent a 'large repair' costing £37,523. 17s. 1d. Re-commissioned under Howe in 1789, she became the flagship of Lord Hood the following year.[7]

Storm clouds brewed over Europe. As a result of supporting the American cause, France herself was hurled into her own bloody revolution in 1789. The outcome was to have a devastating effect on Europe as a whole. With the opening of the French Revolutionary War in 1793, *Victory* became the flagship of Lord Hood who was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean fleet. While blockading Toulon, the ship was engaged in capturing the French vessels within this port and in July took part in the siege of San Fiorenzo, Calvi and Bastia on the Island of Corsica. It was during these actions that a young captain, Horatio Nelson, made his name.

In 1794 *Victory* returned to Plymouth and Hood, his health shattered, lowered his flag. After another refit in 1795, the ship returned to the Mediterranean under Admiral Man. That July *Victory* led the offensive in the unsuccessful action off Hyères where Admiral Hotham failed to fully engage the Toulon fleet. The consequences of his withdrawal were disastrous as Britain abandoned the Mediterranean. Nelson played a minor role at this battle commanding the 64-gun *Agamemnon*. After a brief command under Linzee, Admiral Sir John Jervis, later Earl St Vincent, hoisted his broad pendant on *Victory* the following December. On 14 February 1797, off Cape St Vincent, he led *Victory* with 14 ships of the line against a Spanish Squadron comprising 27 ships under Córdoba. A decisive victory was won. Much was due to Nelson's intuition who, now a Commodore in the 74-gun *Captain*, quitting the line of battle, strategically cut off the enemy's escape. Nelson engaged and boarded the 112-gun *San Josef*, then, using this ship as a 'patent boarding bridge', captured the neighbouring 80-gun *San Nicholas*. This action earned Nelson a knighthood, and promotion to rear-admiral.[8]

In October 1797 *Victory* returned to England and was surveyed at Portsmouth. Now 32 years old and battle weary the ship was sent to Chatham to await her fate. On 8 December, considered unfit for service, *Victory* was ordered to be converted to a hospital ship, and ultimate disposal. Fortune intervened when the First Rate *Impregnable* was lost near Chichester on 8 October 1799, creating an urgent need for an additional three-decked ship within the Channel fleet. Consequently, *Victory* was given a new lease of life. The survey revealed that she was 'in want of a middling repair' at an estimate of £23,500.[9]



Thomas Hardy was the Captain of HMS *Victory* at the fateful moment when the battle was won and when the hero Nelson died.

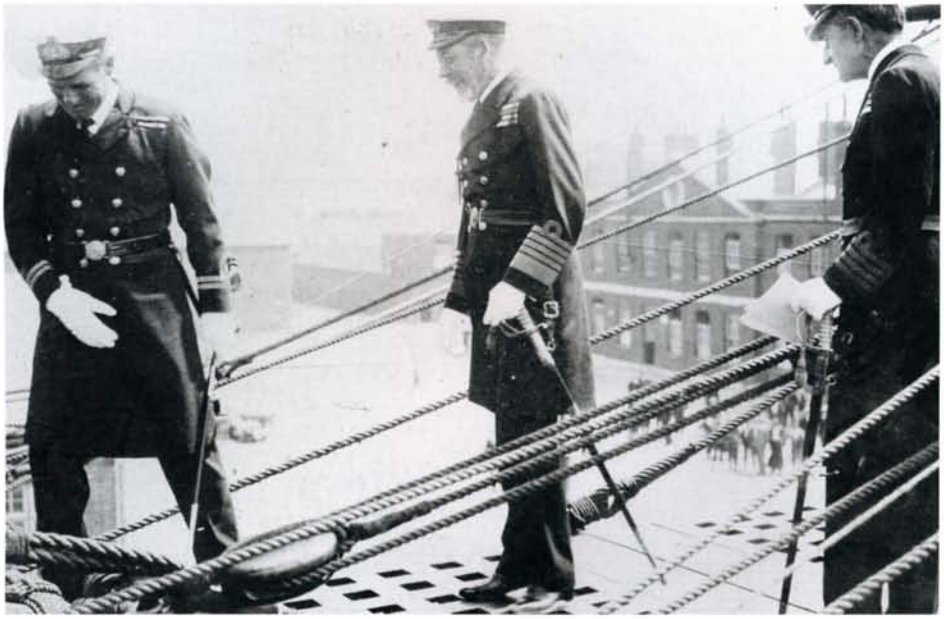
Refitting commenced at Chatham in 1800. A second survey highlighted considerable disorder: various parts of the hull required rebuilding, over 60 per cent of her knees needed refastening or replacing and many port lids needed refitting. To comply with recent improvements, her open stern galleries were removed and the entire stern was closed in. Two extra ports were cut on her lower gun deck and the magazines were lined in copper, conforming to current practice. The heavy ornate figurehead, now very rotten, was substituted with a simpler, lighter design. This, together with reduced ornate work on the stern, corresponded to contemporary restrictions on carving expenses. Composite masts, furnished with iron hoops, replaced her pole masts. The ship was also repainted with the black and yellow livery as seen today, albeit the port lids remained yellow. These were later painted black, producing the much-imitated 'Nelson chequer' pattern.

By March 1801, war had exhausted Britain and France and under the new administration of Henry Addington Britain negotiated a short-lived peace with France, ratified by the Peace of Amiens, signed on 27 March 1802. Now less urgent, work on *Victory* continued until she was finally undocked on 11 April 1803. The cost of this 'great repair' had now amounted to £70,933, some 66 per cent higher than originally estimated. In anticipation that hostilities would inevitably reopen with France, orders had been sent on 15 March to fit *Victory* for service. Ready for sea, all her heavy lower-deck 42-pounder guns had been replaced with lighter and more manageable 32-pounders.[10]

Re-commissioned under Captain Samuel Sutton on 9 April 1803, *Victory* sailed for Portsmouth on 14 May. Hostilities with France reopened on 16 May 1803, with an immediate threat of invasion. As the newly appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean fleet, Vice-Admiral Lord Nelson hoisted his flag in the *Victory* at Portsmouth on 18 May but as the ship was not yet ready Nelson lowered his flag two days later and sailed for the Mediterranean in the frigate *Amphion* commanded by Captain Thomas Masterman Hardy. Provisionally appointed as flagship for Admiral Cornwallis stationed off Ushant, *Victory* sailed later. Finding that Cornwallis did not require the ship, Sutton continued into the Mediterranean, where, on 31 July, Nelson joined the *Victory* taking Captain Hardy with him in command, Sutton transferring into the *Amphion*.[11]

For the next year, Nelson blockaded the French fleet in Toulon to prevent them escaping to join forces with other squadrons based in France's Atlantic arsenals. Periodically ships of Nelson's squadron would retreat to repair at a safe anchorage of Agincourt Sound, Corsica. It was on such an occasion, 19 May 1805, that frigates, Nelson's 'eyes of the fleet', suddenly approached, signalling that the Toulon fleet under Villeneuve had sailed. *Victory* weighed anchor immediately and the 'great chase' began that was to lead the *Victory* first eastward to Alexandria, then across to the Atlantic and back. With no news, Nelson quit the Mediterranean, passing the Straits of Gibraltar on 4 May. Napoleon's invasion plan was beginning to unfold, with Villeneuve sailing to the West Indies to draw the English from the Channel. Nelson followed in hot pursuit and foiled Napoleon's intentions. He finally ran the enemy to ground at Cadiz where the combined French and Spanish fleet was blockaded. *Victory*, with a fatigued Nelson, dropped anchor at Spithead on 18 August. After brief respite the *Victory* sailed with Nelson from Portsmouth on 15 September and joined the blockading fleet under Collingwood off Cadiz on the 28th.[12]

Much damaged, the *Victory* was towed to Gibraltar and finally returned to Portsmouth, arriving on 4 December bearing her fallen hero. After repairs at Chatham costing £9,936, the *Victory* was re-commissioned in March 1808 as flagship of Admiral Saumarez, undertaking operations supporting the Swedes in the Baltic campaign. Next she was sent to Spain to evacuate the remnants of Sir John Moore's army from Corunna, returning on 23 January 1809. April saw her back in the Baltic for the blockade of Kronstadt, and later Karlscrona. The year 1811 saw the ship under Yorke transporting reinforcements to Lisbon for Wellington's army in the Peninsular War. Finally, after further campaigning in the Baltic, and now 47 years old, she finally returned to Portsmouth on 4 December 1812 and 'paid off' 16 days later.[13]



King George V visits HMS *Victory* in 1922 at the beginning of her restoration.

Between 1814 and 1816 *Victory* was rebuilt with much alteration. The ornate beakhead bulkhead had been replaced with a more practical round bow, her bulwarks were built up higher and her sides were painted with black and white horizontal stripes. As war with France had finally ended, she was placed back into 'ordinary' (reserve) until 1824 when she took on a new role as flagship for the Port Admiral and later tender to the Duke of Wellington. In 1831 the ship was listed for disposal but Hardy, now First Sea Lord, at his wife's request refused to sign and gave *Victory* her second reprieve. Refitted in 1888, she was re-coppered for the fifteenth and last time. The following year she became flagship for the Commander-in-Chief Naval Home Command.

Disaster struck in 1903 when *Victory* was accidentally rammed by *Neptune* which was under tow to the breakers. After emergency docking she went back to her familiar moorings. This event, together with the ensuing Centenary of Trafalgar, raised questions about her future, though the subject was put on hold for the duration of the First World War. Finally, through a national appeal raised by the Society for Nautical Research, *Victory* was put into her current dock on 12 January 1922 and restored to her 1805 appearance as a living monument to the Royal Navy. Final restoration, together with a highly integrated interpretation programme, commenced in 1991, made the ship ready for the Bicentennial of the battle of Trafalgar in 2005. As the world's longest serving ship in commission, she continued to serve as the flagship for the Second Sea Lord/Commander-in Chief Naval Home Command as well as a public attraction.[14]

To operate a ship of this magnitude required a crew of some 850 men including marines. Fully armed, stored and provisioned, *Victory* displaced a weight 3,500 tons. With a sail area equal to one and a third the size of a football pitch, under certain wind conditions she could attain a speed of 11 knots, about 12.5mph.[15]

VICTORY'S STATISTICS AT TRAFALGAR

Length overall (figurehead to taffrail)	227ft 6in.	69.34m
Length on the gun deck	186ft	56.70m
Length of the keel for tonnage	152ft 3 $^{5}/_{8}$in.	46.43m
Moulded breadth	51ft 6in.	69.34m
Extreme breadth	51ft 10in.	56.70m
Depth in hold *	21ft 6in. *	19.65m
Burthen	2,162 tons	2,196.60 tonnes
Displacement	3,500 tons	3,556.00 tonnes
Draught afore	23ft 9in.	7.24m
Draught abaft	24ft 5in.	7.44m
Average Speed	8 knots	9mph
Highest Speed Recorded	11 knots	12.5mph
Complement	850	
Complement (at Trafalgar)	820 (excluding Nelson)	

*This internal measurement, taken from the underside of the lower gun deck planking to the inner planking near the centre of the hold excludes the orlop deck, the orlop not being classified as a proper deck in the true sense.[16]

The quarterdeck of HMS *Victory* includes a brass plate marking the point where Nelson fell. (By kind permission of the Commanding Officer of HMS *Victory*)

Victory's masts were made from fir, pine or spruce, this type of wood being both light in weight and flexible. Mast timber was imported from the Baltic States and Norway. When she was first built, each lower mast was made from a single tree 3ft in diameter. This form of mast was called a 'pole mast'. Timber for pole masts was imported from New England but with the American War of Independence this supply was stopped. This was resolved by introducing an alternative system of mast-making which had already been adopted by the French. Known as a 'composite mast', the lower masts (main and fore) were manufactured using between seven and nine smaller trees, carefully shaped and joined together to form the required diameter.[17]

When *Victory* sailed from Portsmouth in September 1805 she was rigged with approximately 22,880 fathoms (26 miles or 41.83km) of hemp running and standing rigging, operated using 768 blocks, the largest being 26in. long, the smallest 6in. Additional blocks were used for a variety of functions throughout the ship; anchors and their associated gear, ship's boats, and storing ship. Besides carrying a good quantity of spares, a further 628 were used for the ropes operating the guns.[18]

Cleanliness and order on the upper gun deck: efficiency and high standards of training were to give the English the edge over their opponents at Trafalgar. (By kind permission of the Commanding Officer of HMS *Victory*)

The maximum number of sails *Victory* could be set was 37, including her staysails and studding sails. This vast amount of canvas gave her a sail area of 6,510 square yards (5,468.4 square metres). However, it was very unlikely that all her sails were set at the same time. According to the Boatswain's stores muster for March 1805, a total of 59 sails (including spares) were carried on the ship. Sails were made from canvas, most of which was manufactured in mills in Dundee, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Dorset. The canvas was made up by hand at the Royal Dockyards. *Victory's* sails were made at the sail loft at Chatham Dockyard and would have taken about 20 men 83 days to produce. Her original shot-riddled fore topsail from the battle of Trafalgar is now exhibited at Portsmouth.[19]

ARMAMENT: AT THE BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR *VICTORY* CARRIED THE FOLLOWING GUNS:

Lower Gun Deck	30 × 32-pounders
Middle Gun Deck	28 × 24-pounders
Upper Gun Deck	30 × long 12-pounders
Quarter Deck	12 × short 12-pounders
Forecastle	2 × medium 12-pounders 2 × 68-pounder carronades
Other	1 × 18-pounder carronade*

* Carried in storage for use in the launch.

The overall weight of a broadside fired by *Victory* was 1,148lb (522kg). When the *Victory* first opened fire at the Battle of Trafalgar, all of the guns, with the exception of the carronades on the port side, were treble-shotted. This gave her an opening broadside weight of 3,240lb (1473kg) – nearly 1.5 tons (1.6 tonnes) of iron. The velocity that this mass of iron left the ship was approximately 1,600ft (487.7m) per second.[20]

To reiterate, *Victory* needed a crew of 850 to operate the ship safely; however, at the battle of Trafalgar the total complement, excluding Admiral Nelson, was only 820. As admiral, Nelson lived in quarters comprising four separate compartments – day cabin, dining cabin, bed place and steerage, colloquially called the great cabin, which occupied one quarter the length of the upper gun deck. There were 10 commissioned naval officers of which most lived in the wardroom at the after end of the middle gun deck, while Captain Hardy had a day cabin, dining cabin and bed place at the after end of the quarter deck under the poop. On board were also four commissioned marine officers who lived in the wardroom.

Two views of the Great Cabin show the ample quarters that were provided for Admiral Nelson. (By kind permission of the Commanding Officer of HMS *Victory*)

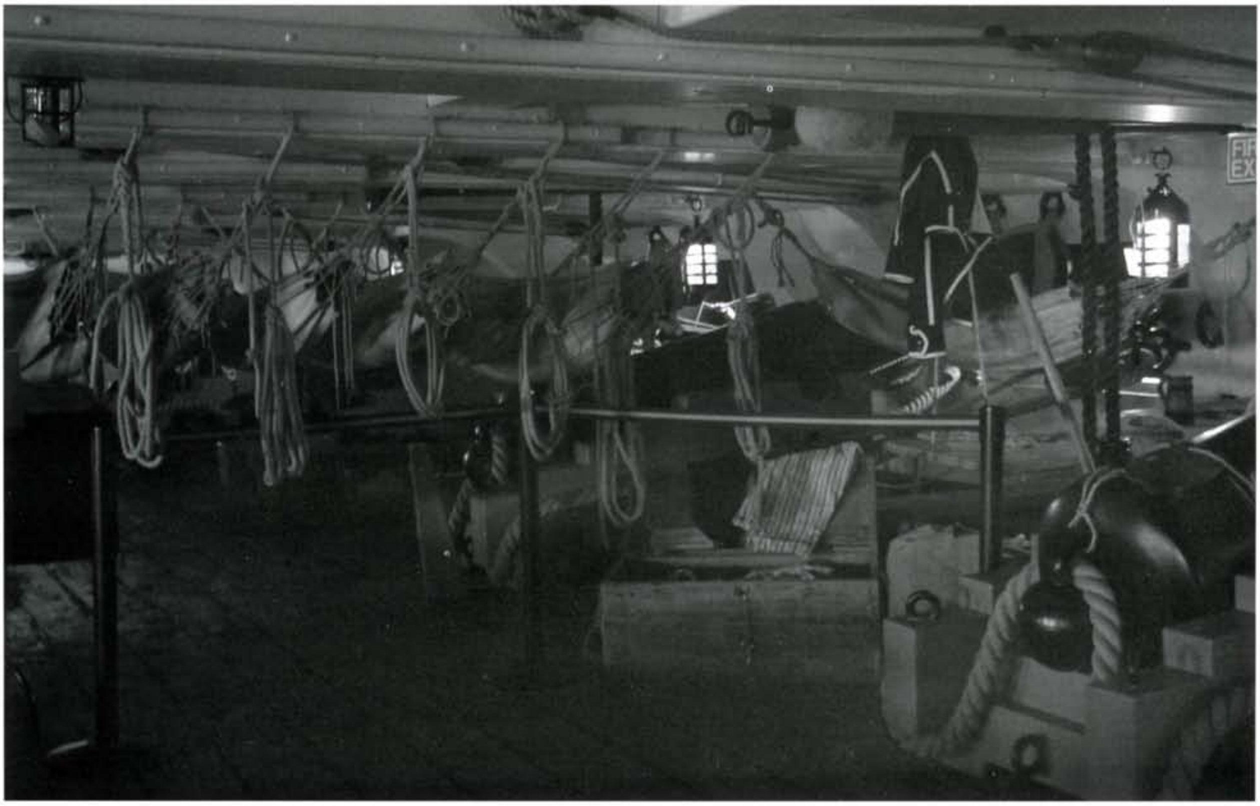
Victory was also served by 44 non-commissioned (warrant) officers, the senior of which was the ship's Master, Thomas Atkinson, who was responsible for the sailing and navigation of the ship. The rest of this number was made up of the Boatswain, Gunner, Carpenter, Purser, Chaplain, Surgeon, Assistant Surgeon, Surgeon's Mate, seven Master's Mates, Admiral's Secretary, Captain's Secretary, Secretary's Clerk, the Agent Victualler and his Clerk, 22 midshipmen and the Ship's Cook (lowest warrant officer status). While half of these men had individual cabins and others shared the gun room at the after end of the lower gun deck, the midshipmen lived together in the after cockpit of the orlop deck.

The captain of the ship was provided with a day cabin and dining cabin as well as a bed space under the poop. (By kind permission of the Commanding Officer of HMS *Victory*)

The main body of the *Victory*'s ship's company, 604 personnel in all, comprised 80 petty officers, 204 able seamen, 195 ordinary seamen, 90 landsmen, four servants and 31 boys. Among this group were the sailmakers, ropemakers, carpenter's crew, coopers, armourers and many other specialists that were necessary for the maintenance of the ship. Most of these people lived and slept on the lower gun deck, divided into groups directed by their watch or station within the ship. Albeit that hanging space per hammock in the navy varied from 14 to 18 depending on the ship, in *Victory* it was set at 16in.; this gave room for some 470 hammocks, the remainder finding space elsewhere. While most of the boys were 14 years old, the younger ones (the youngest being 12) lived under the watchful eye of the gunner in the gun room. Meals were taken at tables slung from the beams between the guns and at every other available space throughout the lower gun deck, each table comprising two individual messes of four or six men.[21]

Also in *Victory* was a company of 149 marines from the Chatham Division, comprising four sergeants, seven corporals and 138 privates. These men messed and slept separately on the middle gun deck. Their four marine officers, comprising a Captain, two lieutenants, and one second lieutenant, all lived in the wardroom.[22]

Whether seaman or marine, each man ate reasonably well, receiving three meals per day. Although the quality of the food varied, especially when a ship had been at sea for a long period, there was generally plenty of it. Irrespective of general conceptions, on average each seaman received a daily ration containing



Hammocks arranged in the lower gun deck. The arrangement of watches meant that adjacent hammocks were not all used at the same time. (By kind permission of the Commanding Officer of HMS *Victory*)

Eating utensils on tables adjacent to the guns underline the importance of good nutrition for a hard-working crew. In addition to a high carbohydrate diet of 'hard tack', the men were given generous quantities of beer and wine. (By kind permission of the Commanding Officer of HMS *Victory*)

between 4,000 and 5,000 calories. This was important, as most of the work on a man-of-war was very labour-intensive. Bread, which came in the form of a very hard biscuit, called 'hard tack', had to be softened with water before eating. Although the basic diet comprised salted meat, peas, oatmeal, cheese and butter, supplemented with raisins and molasses, every opportunity was made to procure fresh vegetables and meat from the victualling ships or from land. Equally important, the ship carried large quantities of lemons or limes, which, high in vitamin C, were used to combat scurvy. Extant ship's logbooks record that fresh foodstuff and livestock was frequently embarked.[23]

The main drink supplied was water, beer, rum and wine. In addition, brandy, Madeira and sometimes port would have been carried for the officers, but usually at their own expense. The ship could carry up to 355 tons (360.6 tonnes) of water. Water was kept in large casks called leaguers stored in the lower level of the hold. As water did not keep well at sea, and deteriorated after a month or so, fresh water was embarked at every opportunity. This was done by conveying empty casks in boats ashore for refilling. The most common drink was beer, each man receiving one gallon (4.5lit) per day. The maximum capacity of beer carried was

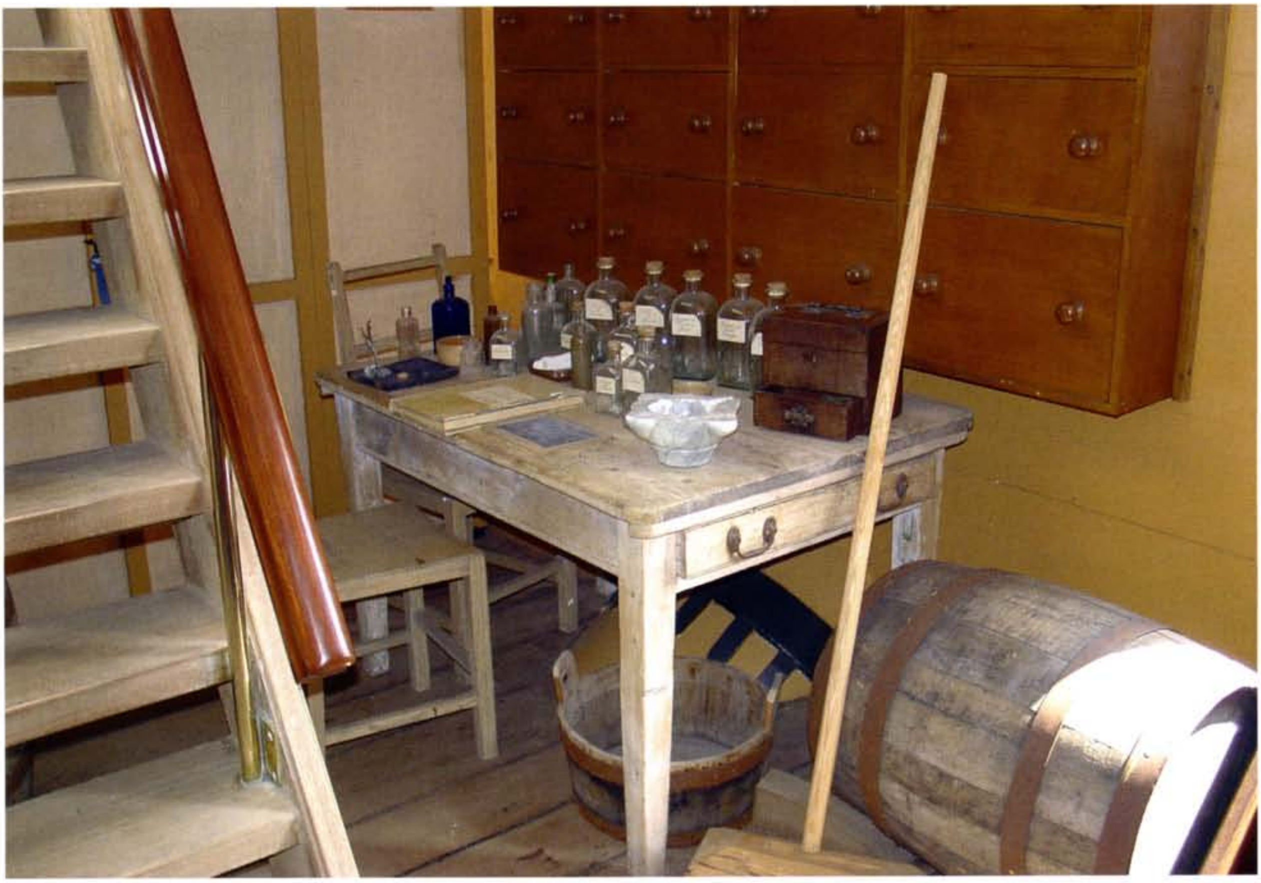
50 tons (50.8 tonnes). The alternative ration to beer was either 2 pints (1.12lit) of wine or half a pint (0.28lit) of rum or brandy. Rum was watered down with two parts water to one part rum: this was known as 'grog'.[24]

Victory was equipped with a designated sick berth, or 'bay', sited on the starboard side of the upper gun deck underneath the forecastle. This area, comprising a ward and dispensary, was divided off with canvas and wooden screens. Here, men suffering from disease or injury could be isolated from the cramped confines of the lower deck, and more importantly, from the rest of the crew to prevent contagion. For practical reasons there were many advantages for placing the sick berth up on this deck: these were fresh air, nearby toilet facilities, warmth and ready supply of hot water from the galley.[25]

VICTORY AT THE BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR

Once the order had been given to clear the ship for action, all bulkheads subdividing the ship were taken down or hinged up to the beams out of the way and the ship was stripped of all superfluous gear. While most items such as mess equipment, tables and other furniture, sea chests and so on were struck down into the ship's hold, some items were jettisoned overboard including, according to the records, eight hen coops and one turkey coop.[26]

The dispensary under the forecastle was adjacent to hammocks made up with fresh sheets. Sun and fresh air would have contributed to a speedy recovery. (By kind permission of the Commanding Officer of HMS *Victory*)



DECK OR LOCATION	OFFICERS	SEAMEN AND MARINES	TOTAL
Poop	1 signal lieutenant, 4 marine officers, 1 midshipman	3 yeoman signallers, 1 sergeant, 8 marines	18
Quarter deck	Admiral, Captain, Master, First Lieutenant, 4 midshipmen, Admiral's secretary	7 quartermasters, 4 quartermaster's mates, 6 gun captains, 54 guns' crew (seamen and marines), 4 boys	84
Aloft in the main, fore, & mizzen tops		3 captains of the tops, 14 topmen	17
Forecastle	1 lieutenant, Boatswain, 2 midshipmen	2 gun captains, 13 guns' crew (seamen), 1 boy	20
Upper gun deck	2 lieutenants, 5 midshipmen	1 mate, 4 quarter gunners, 15 gun captains, 135 guns' crew (seamen & marines), 9 boys	171
Middle gun deck	2 lieutenants, 5 midshipmen	2 mates, 4 quarter gunners, 14 gun captains, 154 guns' crew (seamen & marines), 9 boys	190
Lower gun deck	2 lieutenants, 5 midshipmen	2 mates, 4 quarter gunners, 15 gun captains, 210 guns crew (seamen & marines), 9 boys	247
Orlop – after-Cockpit and wings	Surgeon, Assistant surgeon, Purser, Chaplain	6, including Loblolly boys, clerks and so on	10
Orlop – after-hanging magazine		1 yeoman of the powder room, 1 landsman	2
Orlop – fore-hanging magazine		1 yeoman of the powder room, 1 landsman	2
Grand Magazine		1 Gunner's mate, 1 Cooper, 4 Seamen	6
Grand magazine light room		Cook, Master at Arms	2
Ammunition train		72 Misc. landsmen, supply and secretariat ratings	52
TOTAL			**821**

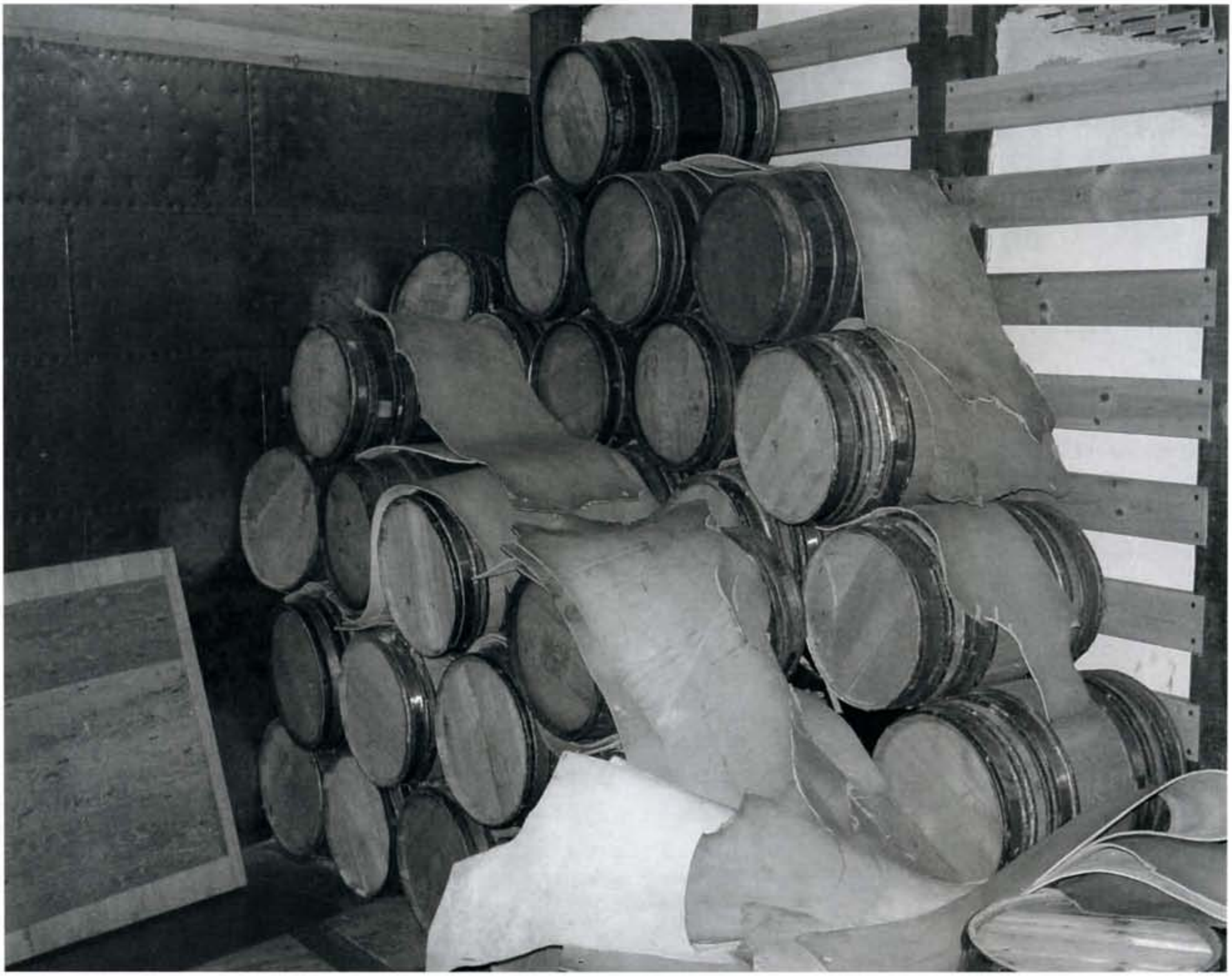
When going to 'quarters', each man had a specific task and place of duty within the ship during battle; this was written up in the ship's Watch and Station

Bill. As *Victory* sailed towards the Combined Fleet, her men were stationed at quarters throughout as shown in the table on page 158.

Including Lord Nelson, *Victory* sustained 19.4 per cent casualties during the battle, comprising 54 killed and 102 wounded. Within four days, three more had died, one of which was a boy, bringing the toll to 57 dead. These figures equate to 6.9 and 12.42 per cent of *Victory's* crew.

During the battle *Victory* expended 7.67 tons of gunpowder and 27.87 tons of round shot, the latter amounting to 2,669 rounds. These quantities represented 12.91 per cent of the 35 tons of gunpowder she carried when fully stored and 23.23 per cent of the 120 tons of shot generally carried. In addition her crew fired off 186 grape shot and just 35 bar shot, most of these items being fired from her 12-pounders.[27]

Besides personnel, *Victory* was severely damaged, suffering considerable loss in masts and rigging. In all she lost her entire mizzen mast together with its various topmasts and yards, gaff and driver booms. She also lost a fore yard, both spritsail yards and flying jib booms. Although retained till after the battle,



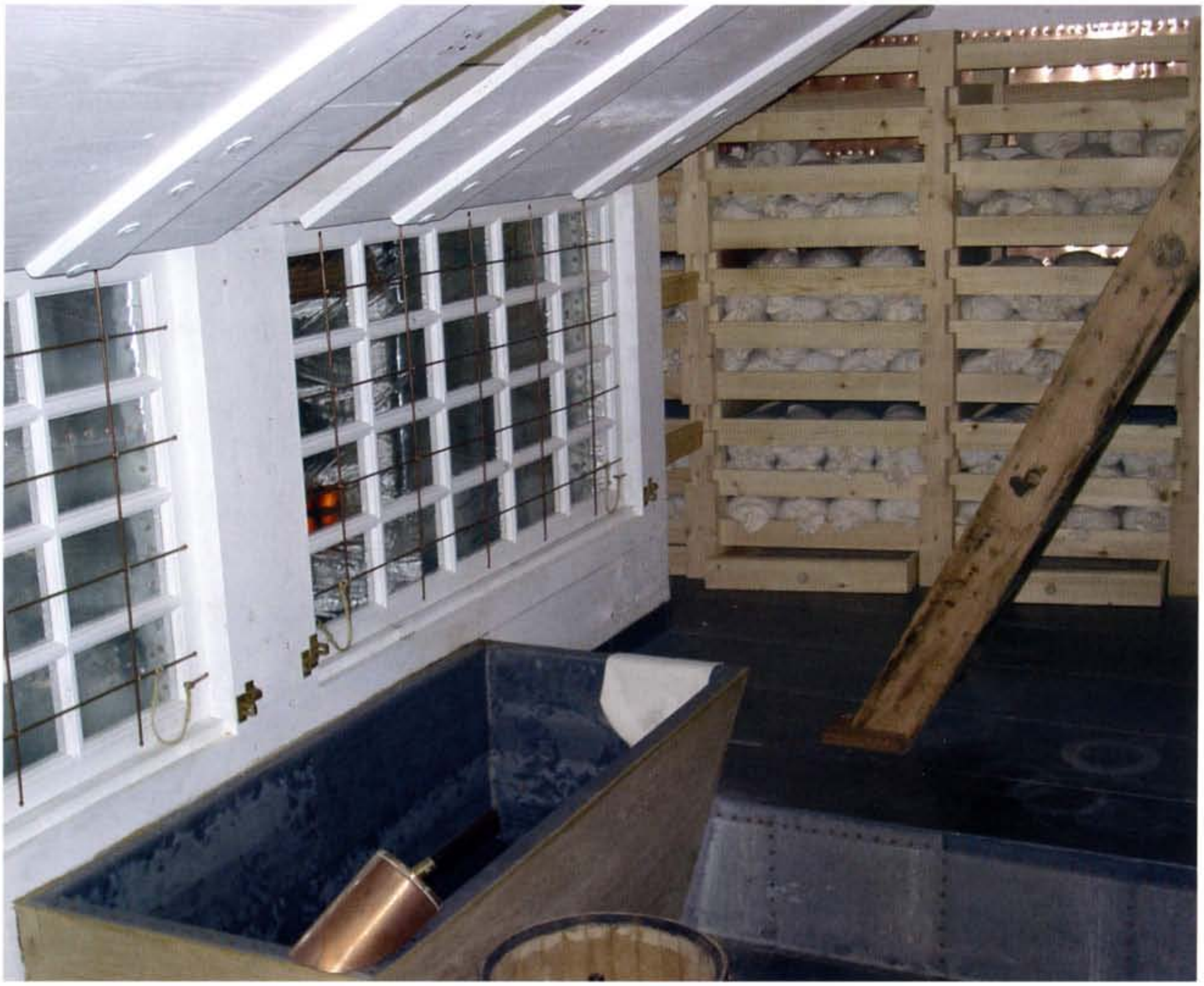
The magazine was lined with copper to prevent rats getting in, while the powder barrels themselves were rested on leather skins to prevent chafing or sparks. (By kind permission of the Commanding Officer of HMS *Victory*) her fore topmast and yard had to be sent down as both were much injured with shot. It was at this point her fore topsail was unbent from its yard and sent down on deck to be stowed in the sail room. This initial act was one of many that allowed the battle-torn sail to survive for posterity. All of her boats were damaged as they stood on the booms in the waist of the ships, together with their respective masts and sails. Two cupids forming part of *Victory's* figurehead were also damaged, the larboard figure with its red sash having its arm shot away, the starboard figure with its blue sash losing its leg.

Shoring had to be set up under the starboard side of the forecastle where beams were near collapse and her starboard cathead had completely gone. The open upper decks were very much scored with shot and grenade explosions and blackened where fires had briefly started and the flat beakhead bulkhead at the head of the ship was completely riddled with round shot. So weak was this always-vulnerable part of the ship that it had been penetrated by grape shot. When she was later inspected it was found that there were some 300 shot embedded in her hull which had not penetrated enough to cause serious damage or injury.

During the storm following the battle, remaining mast and spar were adapted to provide *Victory* with a jury rig to prevent her running into danger on the treacherous lee shores around Cape Trafalgar. Her jib boom was removed and set up as a jury mizzen mast to balance her rig. This was supported by making a step using 10ft of three-inch oak plank and 15ft of elm four inches thick. Spare timber carried in the form of 48ft of four-inch thick oak plank and 40ft of three-inch oak plank were expended to 'fish' the shot riddled main mast: in effect, the mast was given splints.

As if the ship was not already in poor shape, the ensuing storm further took its toll, during which she lost her main yard. In his accounts, Mr Bunce, the ship's carpenter, also lists what items were 'Shot away, thrown overboard with the Bulk Heads in Clearing Ship and Missing after the Action'. Such equipment included two marine's arms chests, two armourers' benches, one airing stove, one anvil, five poop lanthorns 14 canvas births (cabins) and one grinding stone. Bunce also lists innumerable quantities of materials: lead and copper sheathing, nails, bolts and so on, as well as timber that was consumed making the necessary repairs while the ship made her way, on occasion under tow, first from the *Polyphemus* (64) and then by the *Neptune* (98), and her short refitting at Gibraltar.

In the Boatswain's accounts compiled by William Wilmet, some 20 sails are listed as damaged or lost and nearly 40 boats' oars, boat hooks and 283 hammocks, which served as splinter barricades in their nettings, were also damaged beyond repair. Losses also included 15 leather buckets, 51 wooden buckets, seven hatchets and two junk axes. His records also show that the hammock cloths, used to protect the hammocks from weather when stowed in the nettings, were used for enveloping the dead before being committed to overboard. This makes sense as hammocks were too necessary a commodity to be used as coffins, as generally believed.



Gun charges line in racks at the back, while on the left a lamp lies behind thick glass windows. The lamps could only be accessed from behind to obviate the danger of a spark making contact with the gunpowder. (By kind permission of the Commanding Officer of HMS *Victory*)

After refitting to get her seaworthy and receiving a spare anchor to replace that which was 'wounded as unserviceable', *Victory* finally sailed from Gibraltar on Monday 4 November to carry Nelson's body home. Contrary winds delayed her homecoming to Portsmouth until Wednesday 4 December.

THE BRITISH FLEET AT TRAFALGAR

The British fleet that was present with the *Victory* at the battle of Trafalgar comprised 33 ships in total, of which 27 were line-of-battle-ships, four frigates, the remaining vessels being the armed schooner *Pickle* and the cutter *Entreprenante*. Moreover, the ships in Nelson's fleet were not all British built: the 80-gun *Tonnant*, the 74-gun ships *Belleisle* and *Spartiate* and the 10-gun cutter *Entreprenante* were all French-built vessels that had been captured at some point in time. Unlike the French and Spanish ships present, most of which were identical in class and designer, the ships in the British fleet varied considerably in design and age as shown in the tables on the following pages, *Victory* herself being 40 years old.

With the exception of *Britannia,* which was designed under the old 1745 Establishment, specifications authorized under the committee of the Navy Board, seven of the ships were designed by Thomas Slade, nine by John Henslow and three by John Williams, each of these men holding the post of Surveyor of the Navy. Sixty-eight per cent of the British built ships were constructed within the Royal dockyards of Chatham, Deptford, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Sheerness and Woolwich, with the majority being built in Deptford (eight) and Chatham (five, including the *Victory).* Only two were built in Portsmouth, three in Plymouth and one at Sheerness and Woolwich respectively. The remainder were built in various yards under private contract, three of which were constructed by Henry Adams at the Buckler's Hard on the River Beaulieu, Hampshire. Here timber was supplied direct from the New Forest.

While each of the ships are specified by rate, carrying a specific number of guns; in other words, 100, 80, 74 and so on, quite a number of the ships were actually carrying additional ordnance in the form of carronades mounted on their uppermost decks, forecastle and poop. By analysis it is found that the 33 ships forming the entire battle fleet and the 27 line-of-battle ships that actually fought were carrying armament as detailed on pages 164–65.

By comparison, Wellington's allied forces at the battle of Waterloo in 1815 had only 163 guns comprising 60 9-pounders, 70 6-pounders, and 31 24-pounder howitzers providing an overall weight of fire of 1,704lb, which is only 32.6 per cent greater than one broadside from the *Victory*. The overall weight of firepower of the 33 British ships at Trafalgar amounted to 51,962lb. The total firepower of the 27 British line-of-battle ships was 48,010lb. This amounted to 75.26 per cent of the combined firepower of the 2,971 guns carried on the 18 French and 15 Spanish ships of the line, which totalled 63,794lb.

While it is generally conceived that the predominant gun carried in the British ship was the 24- and 32-pounder as shown above, the most predominant gun was in fact the 18-pounder carriage gun which, proportional to its weight and calibre, fired a weighty shot. It also required fewer gun crew. This misconception probably derives from the fact that the *Victory,* which is visited by many people today, was armed with 32-, 24- and 12-pounders. The 18-pounder gun was equally predominant in the French fleet at Trafalgar, whereas the 24-pounder was the common-most gun carried in the Spanish ships.

The 27 British line of battle ships were manned with some 17,000 men, which equates to 57 per cent of the 30,000 men manning the combined Franco-Spanish fleet. Overall British casualties comprised 449 dead and 1,214 wounded. Casualties within the combined fleet were considerably higher: 4,408 dead and 2,545 wounded. That the dead outnumber the wounded related to several factors; the consistency and overwhelming weight of British firepower, which came from 25 per cent fewer guns, it was the sheer rate and consistency of fire that created such casualties. Moreover, French ships were less heavily built therefore were more easily penetrated by shot. The other factor relates to the point that the ships of the Combined Fleet, especially the Spanish ships, were far more heavily manned, thus it was inevitable that casualties were higher.

OPPOSITE

A view from the poop deck shows the complexity of rigging. The boat on the right is the Admiral's barge. (By kind permission of the Commanding Officer of HMS Victory)

STATISTICS OF THE BRITISH SHIPS AT TRAFALGAR

Ship's Name	Rate	Guns	Designer	Launch Date[1]	Age in 1805[2]	Fate	Date	Total years in service
Britannia	1st	100	1745 Establishment	1762	43	Prison Ship – Broken up	1825	63
Royal Sovereign	1st	100	John Williams	1786	19	Broken up	1841	55
Victory	1st	100	Thomas Slade	**1765**	**40**	Preserved	2005	240
Dreadnought	2nd	98	John Henslow	1801	4	Hospital – Broken up	1857	56
Neptune	2nd	98	John Henslow	1797	8	Prison Ship – Broken up	1818	21
Téméraire	2nd	98	John Henslow	1798	7	Broken up	1838	40
Prince	2nd	98	Thomas Slade	1788	17	Prison Ship – Broken up	1837	49
Tonnant	2nd	80	Noel Sane - French	**1798**	**7**	Broken up	1821	23
Achille	3rd	74	Copy French lines	1798	7	Sold & broken up	1865	67
Ajax	3rd	74	Thomas Slade	1798	7	Accidentally burnt	1807	9
Belleisle	3rd	74	Thomas Slade	**1795**	**10**	Broken up	1841	46
Bellerophon	3rd	74	Thomas Slade	1786	19	Prison Ship – Broken up	1836	50
Colossus	3rd	74	John Henslow	1803	6	Broken up	1826	23
Conqueror	3rd	74	John Henslow	1801	4	Broken up	1822	21
Defence	3rd	74	John Henslow	1763	42	Wrecked	1811	48
Defiance	3rd	74	Thomas Slade	1783	22	Prison Ship – Broken up	1817	34
Leviathan	3rd	74	Copy French lines	1790	15	Prison Ship – Broken up	1848	58
Mars	3rd	74	John Henslow	1794	11	Broken up	1823	29
Minotaur	3rd	74	Copy French lines	1793	12	Wrecked	1810	17

STATISTICS OF THE BRITISH SHIPS AT TRAFALGAR (Continued)

Ship's Name	Rate	Guns	Designer	Launch Date[1]	Age in 1805[2]	Fate	Date	Total years in service
Orion	3rd	74	William Bately	1787	18	Broken up	1814	27
Revenge	3rd	74	John Henslow	1805	6 mnths	Broken up	1849	44
Spartiate	3rd	74	Noel Sane - French	**1798**	**7**	Sheer Hulk – Broken up	1857	59
Swiftsure	3rd	74	John Henslow	1804	1	Receiving Ship – Broken up	1841	37
Thunderer	3rd	74	Thomas Slade	1783	22	Broken up	1814	31
Africa	3rd	64	John Williams	1781	24	Broken up	1814	33
Agamemnon	3rd	64	Thomas Slade	1781	24	Wrecked	1807	26
Polyphemus	3rd	64	John Williams	1782	23	Powder ship - Broken up	1827	45
Naiad	5th	38	William Rule	1797	8	Coal Ship in Peru	1866	69
Euryalus	5th	36	William Rule	1803	2	Prison Ship – Broken up	1860	57
Phoebe	5th	36	Edward Hunt	1795	10	Slop Ship – Broken up	1841	46
Sirius	5th	36	Copy French lines	1797	10	Grounded & burnt to prevent capture	1810	13
Pickle	Schooner	12	William Rule	1802	5	Lost – Foundered	1808	6
Entreprenante	Cutter	10	Unknown	**1798**	**7**	Broken up	1812	14

1 Launch dates denoted in bold type indicate date French prize ships entered into British navy.

2 Ages in 1805 denoted in bold type relate to time that prize ships are in service to that date.

While many of the British ships sustained considerable damage, many having lost masts, none were lost in battle or the storm afterwards and slowly but surely each either refitted at sea or, like *Victory*, got into Rosio Bay, Gibraltar to effect their repairs. The *Victory* was refitted at Chatham in 1806 and went back into service in 1808. Other ships actively continued to serve on the Mediterranean station while others were re-deployed in various theatres of war.

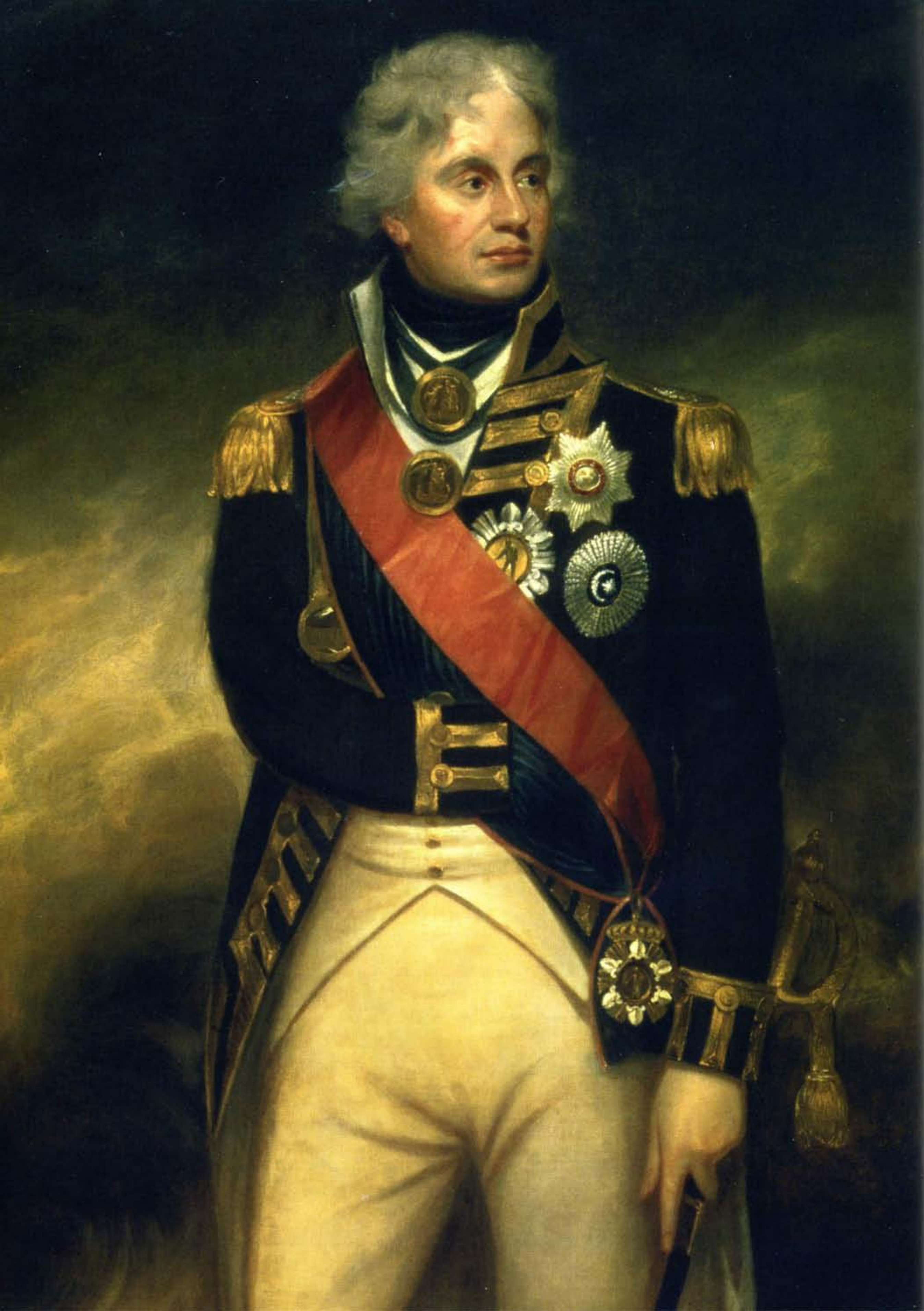
ORDNANCE OF THE BRITISH TRAFALGAR FLEET

Gun Type & Calibre (Weight of shot)	Total No. of Guns in fleet of 33 misc. ships	Total No. of Guns in the 60 line-of-battle ships
32-pounder carriage gun	624	624
24-pounder carriage gun	374	374
18-pounder carriage gun	756	624
12-pounder carriage gun	162	162
9-pounder carriage gun	238	222
6-pounder carriage gun	32	32
68-pounder carronade	2	2
32-pounder carriage gun	128	90
24-pounder carriage gun	6	6
18-pounder carriage gun	30	30
12-pounder carriage gun	18	0
TOTAL No. OF GUNS	**2,370**	**2,166**

Ironically a number of Nelson's Trafalgar ships were unfortunately wrecked or destroyed in some manner or other. The *Agamemnon* grounded and sank in Maldonado Bay on the River Plate while serving on the South American station in 1807 but with no loss of life, whereas the *Minotaur* was lost off the coast of Denmark and, more tragically, the *Defence* was also lost off Denmark the following year with few survivors. While serving in the East Indies in 1810 the frigate *Sirius* ran aground while in action and had to be burnt to prevent her falling into French hands, and the *Ajax* was accidentally lost by fire. *Pickle*, the armed schooner that brought the first news of Trafalgar and loss of Nelson back to England in November 1805, was lost at sea with all hands in 1808.

When the war against Napoleon finally ended on the Field of Waterloo in 1815 many of the Trafalgar ships were decommissioned and laid up, awaiting their fate. Some were used as receiving ships for men entering the navy, others used as powder hulks. Of the other surviving ships, seven were converted and served as prison ships for standard convict or French prisoners of war before finally being broken up. These comprised the *Britannia, Neptune, Prince, Bellerophon, Defiance, Leviathan* and Captain Blackwood's renowned frigate *Euryalus*. The three 98-gun ships, *Dreadnought*, *Neptune* and *Téméraire*, all of the same design, proved to be poorly built and saw little service afterwards.

The *Victory* is the only surviving Trafalgar ship preserved in dry dock at Portsmouth today. Still in commission, she is manned by serving officers and ratings of the Royal Navy flying the white ensign and flagship of the Second Sea Lord/Commander-in-Chief Naval Home Command. Equally served by her Victory Corps of Guides, she operates as a public museum attracting national and international visitors.



CHAPTER SEVEN

'ENGAGE THE ENEMY MORE CLOSELY'

REAR-ADMIRAL JOSEPH CALLO

As dawn broke at Cape Trafalgar on 21 October 1805, the sky was overcast but not ominous; a gentle west-northwest breeze rippled the surface of the swells rolling in rhythmically from the west. The soft daybreak gave no hint of the carnage to come.

As the morning light grew over the southernmost tip of Spain, however, two slowly moving fleets of powerful ships of the line – 27 British plus 33 French and Spanish in the Combined Fleet – were gradually illuminated. The ships' sails gradually turned from darkest gray to a shade that harmonized with the morning light. The water through which the ships eased also changed colour, from pitch black to cobalt. Vessels smaller than the ships of the line manoeuvred among the main fleets.

The 27 British ships of the line were led by the 100-gun HMS *Victory,* with Vice-Admiral Lord Nelson embarked as commander-in-chief. The British fleet also included: the 100-gun ships *Britannia* and *Royal Sovereign* – with second in command Vice-Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood embarked; the 98-gun ships *Dreadnought, Neptune, Prince,* and *Téméraire*; the 80-gun ship *Tonnant*; the 74-gun ships *Achilles, Ajax, Belleisle, Bellerophon, Colossus, Conqueror, Defence, Defiance, Leviathan, Mars, Minotaur, Orion, Revenge, Spartiate, Swiftsure* and *Thunderer.* The smallest units among the British ships of the line were the 64-gun ships *Africa, Agamemnon* and *Polyphemus.* Along with the British main fleet were the frigates *Euryalus, Naïad, Phoebe* and *Sirius,* plus the schooner *Pickle* and the cutter *Entreprenante.*

The 18 French ships of the line in the Combined Fleet included the 80-gun ships *Bucentaure* – with Vice-Admiral Pierre Villeneuve embarked as commander-in-chief – *Formidable, Indomptable* and *Neptune*; the 74-gun ships *Achille, Aigle, Algeçiras, Argonaute, Berwick, Duguay Trouin, Fougueux, Héros, Intrépide, Mont Blanc, Pluton, Redoutable, Scipion* and *Swiftsure.* The 15 Spanish ships of the line included the largest known ship of its class at the time the 130-gun

OPPOSITE
Sir William Beechey's portrait shows a battle-worn Nelson in full regalia. (Getty Images/Bridgeman Art Library)

Santísima Trinidad; the 120-gun *Santa Ana*; the 112-gun *Príncipe de Asturias* – with second-in-command of the Combined Fleet Admiral don Federico Gravina embarked; the 84-gun *Argonauta*; the 80-gun *Neptuno*; the 74-gun ships *Bahama, Monarca, Montañes, Rayo, San Augustín, San Francisco de Assisi, San Ildefonso, San Juan Nepomuceno* and *San Justo*. The smallest among the Combined Fleet's ships of the line was the 64-gun *San Leandro*. The Combined Fleet also included the French frigates *Cornélie, Hermoine, Hortance, Rhin* and *Thémis* and the French brigs *Argus* and *Furet*.

FIREPOWER COMPARISON BETWEEN THE SHIPS OF THE LINE OF BRITISH AND COMBINED FLEETS

BRITISH NO. OF GUNS	NO. OF SHIPS	COMBINED FLEET NO. OF GUNS	NO. OF SHIPS
100	3	130	1
98	4	120	1
80	1	112	1
74	16	100	1
64	3	84	1
		80	4
		74	23
		64	1

The total number of guns of the British ships of the line was 2,148, compared to 2,632 guns for the ships of the line of the Combined Fleet.

The two fleets were approximately nine miles apart according to *Victory's* log, and they occupied nearly 50 square miles of the Cape. The ships seemed to move in slow motion, rising and falling on the large Atlantic Ocean swells rolling under them from the west. Signal officers in the ships of both fleets strained to pick up signals at the instant the flags would begin rising from the deck. The sense of anticipation in each of the ships was palpable.

The British maintained a relatively disciplined line-ahead formation while moving towards the north during the night. The exception was *Africa*, which had missed a signal for a fleet course change in the dark and was, by dawn, six miles to the north of the other British ships. A little after six, Nelson signalled from *Victory* to 'Form the order of sailing.'[1] As signal flags hung limply in the light breeze, they would have been difficult for many of the British ships to quickly decipher. But Nelson's tactical signal required little of his captains, other than tidying up their formation. Nelson's next signal was 'Prepare for battle,' followed quickly by 'Bear up in succession on the course set by the Admiral.' The eventual result was two columns of ships about a mile apart, one headed by Nelson, one headed by Collingwood; both columns were bearing straight down on the Combined Fleet.

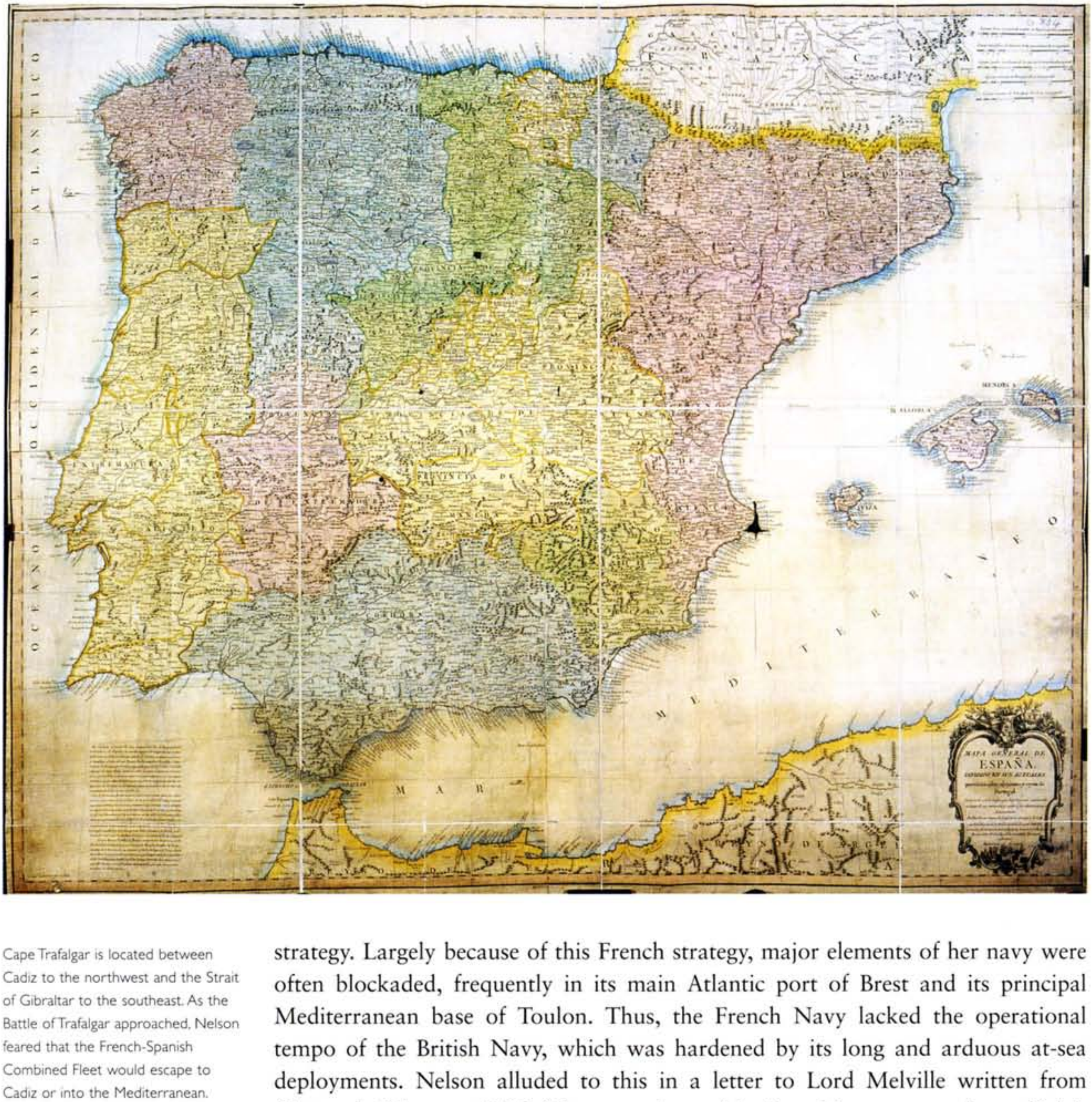
Initially, the Combined Fleet was sailing south, and was to the east and downwind from the British. In that downwind position, Villeneuve had somewhat less tactical leverage than Nelson. And to make tactical matters worse for Villeneuve, he was between the proverbial hammer and anvil, with the British to windward and the rough coast of southern Spain to leeward. During the previous day and night, the Combined Fleet had been sailing mostly in five parallel columns, since it was easier to control a fleet from the centre of such a formation than from the centre of a single line. And at dawn on the 21st, Villeneuve's ships were in irregular clusters stretching almost five miles along the axis of their course.

At about 6:20am, Villeneuve signaled for his ships to form a single line of battle in a predetermined sequence. As was usual for the commander-in-chief in such a formation, he positioned himself at the centre. Villeneuve also ordered his captains to wear ship, reversing the fleet's direction and heading it towards the north. Villeneuve's turn to the north was a clear acceptance of the challenge being thrust forward by Nelson. With the light winds and large swells, however, the French and Spanish ships rolled heavily, dumping the wind from their sails as they manoeuvred. It was a slow process under the circumstances, and it took several hours for the Combined Fleet to carry out Villeneuve's signal. The eventual result was a line-ahead with considerable overlapping at points.

As the morning wore on, the maneuverings of the two fleets continued at a slow pace, at midday a roughly formed French line heading generally north and two roughly formed British lines heading generally east were about to meet. The farthest north of the two British lines was headed by Nelson and was heading for a point about one-third from the Combined Fleet's van. The British line to the south of Nelson that was headed by Collingwood was steering for a point about two-thirds from the Combined Fleet's van. As events would develop, the British ships would initially be in close and violent contact with approximately two-thirds of the Combined Fleet. And because of the state and direction of the wind and the sea conditions, it would take a significant amount of time for the Combined Fleet's van to reverse course and join the close combat.

THE MOOD IN THE COMBINED FLEET

Things were not well in the Combined Fleet. For one thing, a basic part of France's naval strategy had for years been to generally avoid fleet encounters with the British. The objective was to preserve its fleets for support of selective military land campaigns. The goal of seizing naval control of the English Channel to facilitate an invasion of Britain was an important ongoing element of that land-oriented



Cape Trafalgar is located between Cadiz to the northwest and the Strait of Gibraltar to the southeast. As the Battle of Trafalgar approached, Nelson feared that the French-Spanish Combined Fleet would escape to Cadiz or into the Mediterranean. (The National Archives)

strategy. Largely because of this French strategy, major elements of her navy were often blockaded, frequently in its main Atlantic port of Brest and its principal Mediterranean base of Toulon. Thus, the French Navy lacked the operational tempo of the British Navy, which was hardened by its long and arduous at-sea deployments. Nelson alluded to this in a letter to Lord Melville written from *Victory* in February 1805: 'Those gentlemen [the French] are not used to a Gulph of Lyons gale, which we have buffeted for 21 months and not carried away a Spar.'[2]

The lack of at-sea toughening for the French Navy was compounded by purges of the French naval officer ranks following the French Revolution. Many of its best officers were driven from the service, and their replacements, although possessing properly egalitarian backgrounds, were not up to the professional standards of their predecessors. This had inevitably eroded morale and combat effectiveness in the French Navy of the time.

Additional factors contributed to the less than optimistic mood in the Combined Fleet. One of those factors was the Battle of the Nile in 1798, a highly visible and

NELSON'S BAND OF BROTHERS AT THE BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR

- Vice-Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood, second-in-command: HMS *Royal Sovereign*
- Rear-Admiral William Earl of Northesk, third-in-command: HMS *Britannia*
- Captain Thomas Hardy, Flag Captain to Admiral Lord Nelson: HMS *Victory*
- Captain Edward Rotherham, Flag Captain to Vice-Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood: HMS *Royal Sovereign*
- Captain Charles Bullen, Flag Captain to Rear-Admiral William Earl of Northesk: HMS *Britannia*
- Captain Eliab Harvey: HMS *Téméraire*
- Captain Thomas Fremantle: HMS *Neptune*
- Captain John Conn: HMS *Dreadnought*
- Captain Richard Grindall: HMS *Prince*
- Captain Charles Tyler: HMS *Tonnant*
- Captain William Hargood: HMS *Belleisle*
- Captain Robert Moorsom (wounded): HMS *Revenge*
- Captain Sir Francis Laforey: HMS *Spartiate*
- Captain George Duff (killed): HMS *Mars*
- Captain Philip Durham (wounded): HMS *Defiance*
- Captain Charles Mansfield: HMS *Minotaur*
- Captain Israel Pellew: HMS *Conqueror*
- Captain Richard King: HMS *Achilles*
- Captain James Morris (wounded): HMS *Colossus*
- Captain George Hope: HMS *Defence*
- Captain Henry Bayntun: HMS *Leviathan*
- Captain John Cooke (killed): HMS *Bellerophon*
- Captain Edward Codrington: HMS *Orion*
- Captain William Rutherford: HMS *Swiftsure*
  Captain (acting) Lieutenant John Pilford: HMS *Ajax*
- Captain (acting) Lieutenant John Stockham: HMS *Thunderer*
- Captain Robert Redmill: HMS *Polyphemus*
- Captain Henry Digby: HMS *Africa*
- Captain Sir Edward Berry: HMS *Agamemnon*
- Captain the Honourable Henry Blackwood: HMS *Euryalus*
- Captain the Honourable Thomas Capel: HMS *Phoebe*
- Captain Thomas Dundas: HMS *Naïad*
- Captain William Prowse: HMS *Sirius*
- Lieutenant John Lapenotière: HMS *Pickle*
- Lieutenant Robert Young: HMS *Entreprenante*

strategically important defeat by Nelson of a fleet supporting Napoleon's invasion of Egypt. Then there was the matter of the on-again-off-again characteristic of the alliance with Spain. Although Spain's Navy was professional and possessed good ships and men, her intermittent political alliances with France did not translate into efficient joint fleet operations. Finally, there was the matter of Admiral Villeneuve's state of mind, which differed sharply with Nelson's attitude. The French admiral was an able leader, and he even had a pretty good idea of the tactics Nelson would employ. But he was in disfavour with Napoleon and had been virtually forced to put to sea with the Combined Fleet because his replacement as commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean was imminent. Villeneuve saw the impending battle as a slim chance to salvage his career or at least his honor, and his basic instructions to his captains revealed his lack of total commitment to battle. At one point, he wrote:

> 'I by no means propose to seek out the enemy; I even wish to avoid him in order to proceed to my destination. But should we encounter him, let there be no ignominious manoeuvring ... any captain who is not under fire will not be at his post.'[3]

The spirits of the senior Spanish admiral in the Combined Fleet, Federico Gravina, and the three other Spanish flag officers in the Fleet were no more sanguine than that of their French commander-in-chief. For one thing, their enthusiasm for serving in one of Napoleon's fleets was dampened by the emperor's lack of understanding of naval operations. In addition, there had been only intermittent joint operations with the French, and some preliminary training in basic fleet maneuvers with Villeneuve and his captains before the battle could have smoothed out the differences with their French counterparts. But there were none.

THE MOOD IN THE BRITISH FLEET

Nelson had full confidence in his captains and their crews. In a letter to Sir John Acton in April 1805, he was unequivocal: 'Nothing could be finer than the fleet I command.'[4] And because they had maintained arduous deployments during the months leading up to the fateful confrontation off the Spanish coast, they were finely honed. For them, the forthcoming battle would be a release. It was clear to all that Nelson eagerly sought combat with the Combined Fleet. In fact, his main initial worry was that Villeneuve would somehow avoid battle and escape to the northwest into Cadiz or to the southeast into the Mediterranean. There was, in addition, a 'corporate culture' of confidence that had been built up throughout the entire British Navy of the time.

Of particular significance, Nelson had communicated the importance of their mission, his confidence in their abilities, and a sense of optimism concerning the approaching battle to his captains. In turn, his 'band of brothers' communicated their enthusiasm about the outcome of the approaching battle to their crews. Arguably the best example of Nelson's ability to communicate with exceptional effectiveness with his captains was his Memorandum of 9 October.[5] In that message, he laid out his basic tactics, which involved three separate lines of British ships. Two of the lines would concentrate overwhelming force at separate points in the Combined Fleet's line, while a third squadron would be held in reserve. Nelson anticipated that a general mêlée would follow his first actions, and that he would then rely heavily on the individual judgment of his captains and the superior gunnery of the British seamen. In Nelson's words: 'The whole impression of the British Fleet must be to overpower from two or three Ships a-head of the Commander-in-Chief, supposed to be in the Centre, to the rear of their Fleet.' The only later change in the initial tactics outlined on 9 October was the use of two lines in his initial attack, rather than three.[6] It was a change driven by the fact that he had fewer ships than anticipated for the battle.

BEYOND TACTICS

One of the most important elements of Nelson's Memorandum of 9 October was that it established a clear combat doctrine – defined as the overarching attitude that determines how the battle is to be fought minute by minute, notwithstanding the inevitably changing circumstances and difficulty of communicating between ships during the chaos of battle. In fact, Nelson's Memorandum included what is one of the best expressions of a naval combat doctrine in history. He wrote at one point:

> Something must be left to chance; nothing is sure in a Sea Fight beyond all others. Shot will carry away the masts and yards of friends as well as foes....Captains are to look to their particular Line as their rallying point. But, in case Signals can neither be seen or perfectly understood, no Captain can do very wrong if he places his Ship alongside that of an Enemy.

The combat doctrine inherent in Nelson's Memorandum included, among other principles, the importance of seizing the initiative. And that importance of gaining the initiative in Battle was established in Nelson's mind well before the Battle of Trafalgar. In June of 1798, for example, he wrote to his commander-in-chief Admiral the Earl St Vincent before the Battle of the Nile: 'You may be assured I will fight them [the French] the moment I can reach their Fleet, be they at anchor, or under sail.'[7] And before the Battle of Copenhagen in March of 1801, he wrote to his commander-in-chief Admiral Sir Hyde Parker: '[T]he boldest measures are the safest.'[8] Closely linked with Nelson's aggressive combat doctrine was his strong reliance on the initiative of his subordinates. This was never better expressed than in his message to Collingwood, sent on the same day of his Memorandum to his captains:

> I send you my Plan of Attack, as far as a man dare venture to guess at the uncertain position the Enemy may be found in. But, my dear friend, it is to place you perfectly at ease respecting my intentions, and to give full scope to your judgment for carrying them into effect. We can, my dear Coll., have no little jealousies. We have only one object in view, that of annihilating our Enemies, and getting a glorious Peace for our Country. No man has more confidence in another man than I have in you: and no man will render your services more justice than your very old friend...[9]

The aggressive combat doctrine exuded from Nelson's Memorandums also reflected his understanding of what his leadership at Whitehall and the Admiralty, as well as the British public, needed. He wrote to Sir George Rose from *Victory* in early October 1805: '[I]t is, as Mr. Pitt knows, annihilation that the Country wants.'[10]

With all of its brilliance, there has been an enduring mystery associated with Nelson's battle plan. The mystery springs from a letter written to Lady Hamilton on 1 October from *Victory*:

> I believe my arrival was most welcome, not only to the Commander of the Fleet, but also to every individual in it; and, when I came to explain to them the *'Nelson touch,'* it was like an electric shock. Some shed tears, all approved – 'It was new – it was singular – it was simple!'...[11]

'The Nelson touch' was not actually defined by Nelson in his letter, and other references to it by him were also nonspecific. In recent years, after considerable past speculation, students of Nelson's career have generally come to believe that it was the total plan encompassed in the Memorandum of 9 October to his captains that Nelson had labelled 'the Nelson Touch.' Respected Nelson author Colin White, for example, recently wrote: 'Nelson devised a comprehensive battle plan based on his own long experience of war, and on the tactical experiments of his predecessors, which he called 'The Nelson Touch'.[12]

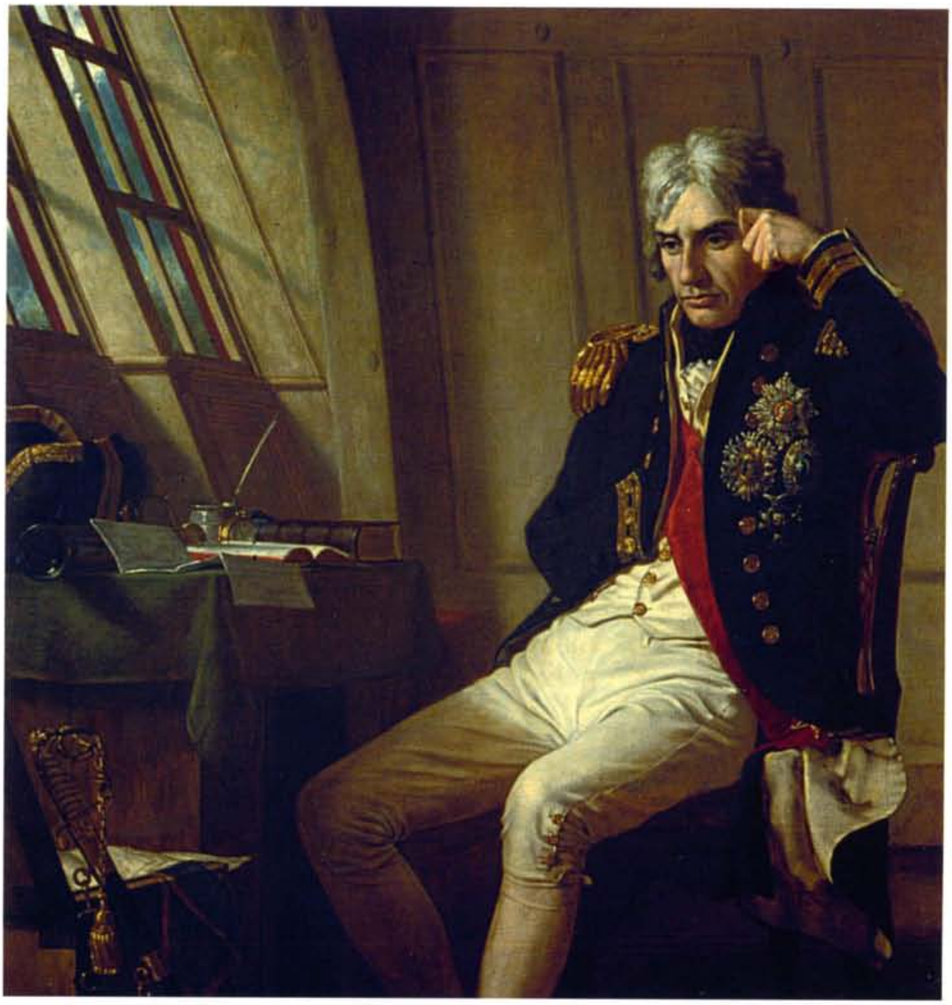
FINAL THOUGHTS BEFORE BATTLE

As the morning wore on, there doubtless was considerable letter writing in both fleets. One of Nelson's captains, George Duff, whose hurried note surely was typical of many others written that morning, wrote from *Mars* to his wife:

> 'My dear Sophia, I have just time to tell you that we are just going into action with the Combined [Fleet]. I hope and trust in God that we shall all behave as becomes us, and that I may have the happiness of taking my beloved wife and children in my arms.'[13]

Duff was killed during the ensuing battle. His son Norwich, listed as a Volunteer 1st Class in *Mars's* crew, did survive, however, and he had the unhappy task of writing to his mother with the news of his father's death.

In *Victory*, Nelson took time to write to his paramour, Lady Emma Hamilton. It was a letter he never finished, and when the uncompleted letter was delivered to Lady Hamilton, she scrawled at the end: 'Oh miserable wretched Emma – Oh glorious & happy Nelson.' Nelson also wrote a tender letter to his and Lady Hamilton's daughter Horatia. At another point, Nelson addressed a wider audience when he made a particularly significant entry in his diary on the morning of the impending battle. Those words became an enduring element of his historical legacy:



Nelson is portrayed at his writing table in *Victory's* great cabin on the morning of the Battle of Trafalgar in a painting Charles Lucy created in 1853. (Royal Naval Museum)

> May the Great God, whom I worship, grant to my Country, and for the benefit of Europe in general, a great and glorious Victory; and may no misconduct in anyone tarnish it; and may humanity after Victory be the predominant feature in the British Fleet. For myself, individually, I commit my life to Him who made me, and may his blessing light upon my endeavours for serving my country faithfully. To Him I resign myself and the just cause which is entrusted to me to defend. Amen. Amen. Amen.[14]

As the morning wore on, there was considerable discussion among the officers in *Victory* about the safety of their commander-in-chief. Some thought Nelson should remove the conspicuous awards he was wearing on his uniform jacket. Some thought he should direct the battle from a frigate, separated from the main action. Nelson had made it abundantly clear, however, that he understood his importance as an example to his captains and their crews, and the concerns of others about the need to protect his person went mostly unexpressed. One of the more interesting footnotes on Nelson's personal preparations for battle was that, for the first time in his career, he did not wear his sword.

As noon approached, with the bands in his various ships playing *Britons Strike Home*, *Rule Britannia*, and *Heart of Oak*, it was time for Nelson's final general signals to his fleet. One signal was 'Prepare to anchor after the close of day.' Since swells created by a storm invariably outrace the storm itself, Nelson knew that the swells from the west signalled the approach of a dangerous storm. He was, as commander-in-chief, thinking even beyond the coming combat.

Nelson also sent a signal to, as he said, 'amuse the fleet.' At first, he ordered, 'Nelson confides that every man will do his duty.' His signal officer Lieutenant Pasco suggested some word changes to reduce the number of signal flags required. The message that was agreed upon and hoisted into the breeze was: 'England expects that every man will do his duty.' Although Collingwood in *Royal Sovereign* was not amused and complained rather gruffly to those on *Royal Sovereign's* quarterdeck that Nelson should stop his signalling, Nelson's nine-word admonition has survived for two centuries as one of the memorable features of the battle of Trafalgar.

NELSON'S GENERAL SIGNALS OF 21 OCTOBER 1805

SIGNAL	ESTIMATED TIME
Form the order of sailing in two columns	0600
When lying-to, or sailing by the wind, to bear up and sail large on the course steered by the Admiral or that pointed out by signal	0600
Prepare for battle	0630
Prepare for battle	1000
England expects that every man will do his duty	1145
Make all sail possible with safety to the masts	1155
Prepare to anchor after the close of day	1200
Engage the enemy more closely	1215

Finally, Nelson ordered his last general signal to the fleet: 'Engage the Enemy More Closely.' It was the final reinforcement of his combat doctrine; no further fleet-wide instructions to his captains would be needed during the battle.

FOCUSED CHAOS

A few minutes after Nelson's last signal, *Royal Sovereign*, with a newly coppered bottom and greater speed than most of the other British ships, closed to about a half-mile of the Combined Fleet's line. By that time the French–Spanish fleet was in the shape of a sweeping curve, with the concave side towards the British. Their line was irregular, and at some points there were ships in the line virtually side by side. They were sailing slowly, at a speed of about three knots (about 3.5mph).

Roughly 15 minutes before noon, the French *Fougueux* fired what is believed to have been the first broadside from the Combined Fleet. For the next 30–45 minutes *Royal Sovereign* was exposed to the broadsides of several of the enemy ships she was approaching, while being able to return fire with only a few bow guns. First there would have been harmless splashes; then holes would have begun appearing in *Royal Sovereign's* sails; then, *Fougueux's* shot began parting *Royal Sovereign's* rigging and tearing at her hull and spars. That early damage to *Royal Sovereign, Victory* and the other ships in the van of the two British lines was a price Nelson paid to carry out his tactical plan. That price was fortunately reduced somewhat, however, by the heavy swells that significantly degraded the accuracy of the French gunners.

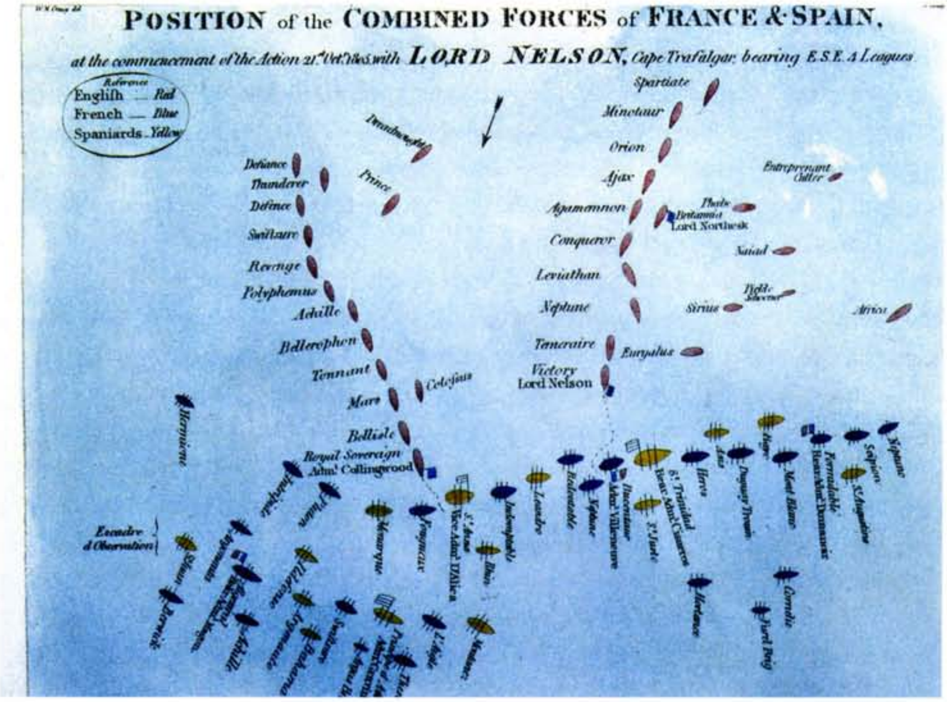
Finally, *Royal Sovereign* drove through the French-Spanish formation behind the 120-gun Spanish *Santa Ana,* the seventeenth ship in the enemy's line. At a range of approximately 30 yards, *Royal Sovereign* unleashed a double-shotted broadside from her port guns that ripped through the Spaniard's stern. The 100 cannon balls swept the length of the *Santa Ana* in a raking shot, killing or wounding an estimated 400 men. *Royal Sovereign* then turned to port and came alongside *Santa Ana.* With their yardarms touching, the two ships began pounding one another at point blank range.

Nelson and *Victory* in the van of the British line to the north arrived at the Combined Fleet line roughly 30 minutes after Collingwood. After suffering the same pounding as *Royal Sovereign* as they approached, *Victory* broke through the enemy's line behind the twelfth ship in the Combined Fleet's line, Villeneuve's flagship the French 80-gun *Bucentaure.* In this instance, the British ship fired a 68-pounder carronade loaded with round shot and a keg of 500 musket balls through *Bucentaure's* stern. The point blank raking shot had an effect similar to *Royal Sovereign's* opening broadside, sweeping along the axis of the enemy ship with incredibly lethal effect.

The carronade blast was followed almost immediately by a broadside fired in sequence from *Victory's* port side, with each of her port guns firing double- and in some cases triple-shotted blasts as it came to bear directly on the French ship's shattered stern. After taking a punishing broadside from the French 80-gun *Neptune, Victory* pulled away from *Bucentaure.* At this point, *Victory's* captain Thomas Hardy turned his attention to the nearby French 74-gun *Redoutable,* with a full broadside from his starboard guns.

After initial contact, Collingwood's line continued to fall one by one on the rear of the Combined Fleet, and Nelson's line similarly enveloped the centre of Villeneuve's force, leaving the French admiral's van to be dealt with in the following stages of the battle. What then ensued was the series of numerous individual, extremely violent, 'pell-mell' struggles Nelson had envisioned in his planning.

An engraving by W.M. Craig and published in 1806 by Edward Orme shows an interpretation of how the British and Combined Fleets were positioned at the beginning of the battle of Trafalgar. (National Maritime Museum)


POSITION of the COMBINED FORCES of FRANCE & SPAIN,
at the commencement of the Action 21st Oct 1805 with LORD NELSON, Cape Trafalgar bearing E.S.E. 4 Leagues
Reference
English — Red
French — Blue
Spaniards — Yellow
Spartiate
Minotaur
Orion
Ajax
Agamemnon
Britannia Lord Northesk
Phoebe
Entreprenant Cutter
Naiad
Conqueror
Leviathan
Neptune
Pickle Schooner
Sirius
Africa
Temeraire
Euryalus
Victory Lord Nelson
Dreadnought
Prince
Defiance
Thunderer
Defence
Swiftsure
Revenge
Polyphemus
Achille
Bellerophon
Tonnant
Colossus
Mars
Belleisle
Royal Sovereign Adml Collingwood
Hermione
Escadre d'Observation
Monarca
Fougueux
S. Anna Vice Adml D'Alava
Intrepide
Leandre
Redoutable
Neptune
Bucentaure Adml Villeneuve
S. Trinidad Rear Adml Cisneros
S. Juste
Heros
Rayo
Duguay Trouin
Mont Blanc
Formidable Rear Adml Dumanoir
Scipion
S. Augustin
Neptune
Hortense
Cornelie
Furet Brig
Pluton
Algesiras
Bahama
Argonauta
Achille
Berwick
Aigle
Swiftsure
Principe de Asturias
Themis
Rhin

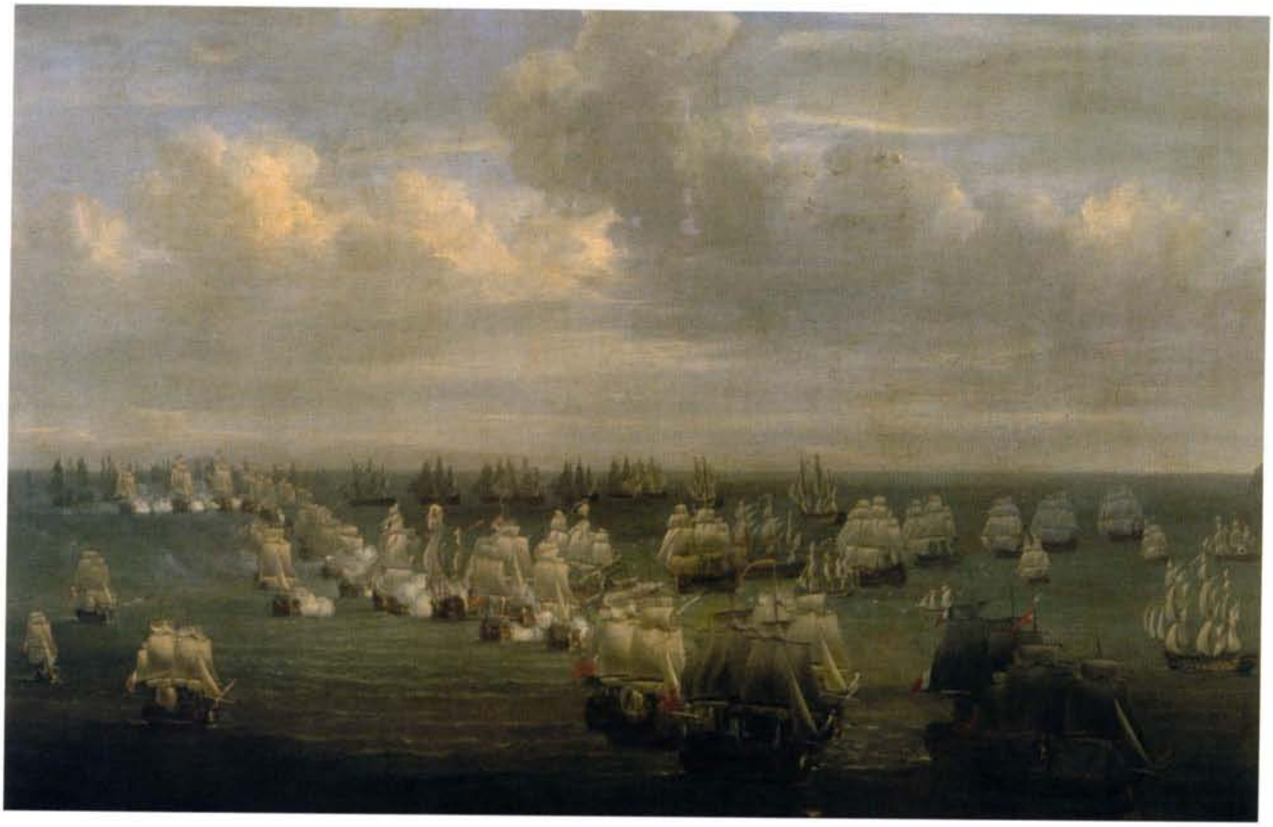
A SERIES OF HELLISH CONFLICTS

After the opening attacks of the British lines, the scene at Trafalgar rapidly evolved into a series of life and death struggles between individual ships and between small clusters of ships. The slow motion ship movements resulting from the light winds added a surrealistic aspect to the mounting violence.

The action that the 74-gun *Achilles* was involved in was one of the numerous individual and overlapping dramas within the overall battle. Her captain Richard King was in the middle of Collingwood's line as it attacked. He broke through the Combined Fleet's formation under the stern of the 74-gun Spanish ship *Montañes,* the twenty-first ship in the initial, roughly formed Combined Fleet line. By this time any semblance of the original British and Combined Fleet formations had dissolved into pockets of violence. Smoke swirled around the ships, making it difficult to maintain any sense of the battle as a whole. The sound of the cannon fire, shot smashing through planking, and yards and masts crashing onto decks was deafening. The screams of the wounded pierced the seamless roar.

As *Achilles* passed under the stern of *Montañes,* King turned to port, and fired a devastating port broadside into the Spanish ship's starboard quarter. King then brought his ship alongside his enemy and the two ships traded point blank broadsides. Within half an hour the Spanish captain was dead and only a junior officer was left alive on the quarterdeck.

Seeing that *Montañes* was virtually out of action, King turned his attention to the 80-gun Spanish *Argonauta* on his starboard beam. For another 30 minutes King exchanged broadside with his new adversary, with a result similar to his



An early 19th-century engraving by J. Fitler from a painting by Nicholas Pocock recreates the scene at the beginning of the battle of Trafalgar. (National Martime Museum)

encounter with *Montañes*. *Argonauta*'s captain was wounded and most of her guns were out of action. With *Argonauta* at the point of surrendering and after a brief encounter with another French ship, King and *Achilles* were attacked by the 74-gun French *Berwick*. *Berwick's* fate was the same as King's first two antagonists. Within two hours, *Achilles* had defeated two Spaniards and one Frenchman. Such were the advantages of Nelson's tactics and doctrine, combined with his aggressive captains, and the more rapid rates of fire of the British gunners.

NELSON IS STRUCK DOWN

The decision of Nelson's flag captain Thomas Hardy to engage the French *Redoutable* was fateful. As *Victory* crashed into *Redoutable*, with her port side to their enemy's starboard side, the yards and rigging of the two ships became entangled, locking them in a deadly embrace. The two ships pounded one another with their cannons literally muzzle to muzzle. Because of the danger of the sails catching fire, sharpshooters had not been deployed aloft in *Victory*. Captain Jean-Jacques Lucas of *Redoutable*, in contrast, had positioned sharpshooters in his ship's rigging and on her tops, and they were firing down on the officers and crew on *Victory's* exposed decks with deadly effect.

One shot, believed to be from *Redoutable's* mizzen topmast, had historic impact. *Victory's* log reported it tersely: 'About 1.15 the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Nelson RB and Commander-in-chief was wounded in the shoulder.'[15]

When Hardy turned and saw the sergeant-major of marines and two seamen lifting Nelson from the deck, he expressed his hope that the admiral was not badly wounded. His commander-in-chief's reply was unequivocal: 'They have done for me at last Hardy.'[16] After Hardy said that he hoped it was not so, Nelson was specific: 'My backbone is shot through.'

Nelson was carried down to the ship's cockpit, deep below the main deck. There, in a small, poorly lit space, the ship's surgeon and his assistants tended to the wounded. It was a gruesome scene; gaping wounds were hurriedly stitched up, and mangled limbs were amputated with cold steel; there were no anaesthetics. The deck in the cockpit was painted red – for good reason. By the time the surgeon got to many of the wounded, they had died. In *Victory*'s cockpit, the roar of battle vibrated violently. At one point even the wounded Nelson reacted to the concussions of his flagship's gunfire: 'Oh Victory, Victory, how you distract my poor brain.'[17] The situation in *Victory*'s cockpit was described by a first-hand witness, the ship's chaplain Dr. John Scott: '[I]t was like a butcher's shambles.'[18]

Nelson had no illusions about surviving. From the time he fell to the deck until his death four hours later, he repeated that he would not live out the battle, making his other words at the time uniquely revealing. He was, of course, concerned with the progress of the battle, and he was also concerned with the condition of *Victory*. On several occasions when Hardy visited him in the cockpit, he urged him to be sure to anchor *Victory* at the end of the Battle. In a more personal perspective, he expressed concern for his paramour, Lady Hamilton, and for their daughter, Horatia. As his death neared, he also indicated that he had come to terms with his God, and he remarked to Dr Scott: 'I have not been a great sinner.' Then, with his last words, Nelson dealt with both 'Him who made me' and what was arguably the major preoccupation of his life. His final words were: 'Thank God I have done my duty.'[19]

A COMBINED FLEET PERSPECTIVE

One of the best of the Combined Fleet's captains was Jean Jacques Lucas, captain of the French *Redoutable*. His view from the deck of his doomed ship provides a valuable reminder of the courage and skill that was present in the Combined Fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar.

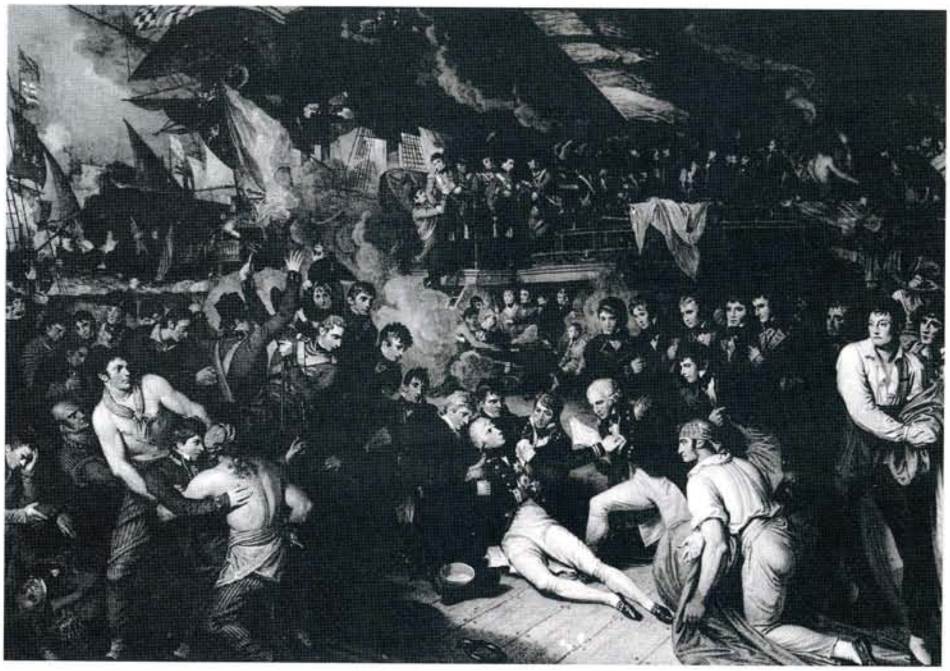
Lucas's ship was thirteenth in the Combined Fleet line as the battle began, immediately astern of the Combined Fleet commandeer-in-chief in *Bucentaure*. As *Victory* broke through the enemy's line, *Redoutable* was one of the ships that engaged her most aggressively. During their portion of the pell-mell battle, Lucas and his men took on not only the British flagship but the 98-gun *Téméraire* and a third British ship, identified by Lucas only as a two-decker.

After taking a heavy broadside from *Victory*, Lucas succeeded in crossing the British ship's bow, bringing his port guns to bear and pouring raking broadsides into that vulnerable part of Nelson's flagship. As the mêlée continued, one of *Victory's* topmasts was shot away, her wheel was shattered, and her mainmast and mizzenmast were heavily damaged. Nelson is reported to have remarked at this stage of the battle: 'This is too warm work, Hardy, to last long.'

In his after-action report, Lucas reported grappling on to *Victory* and attempting to board her after his enemy's exposed decks had been swept clear. Those attempts were thwarted, however, and as *Victory's* situation became perilous, the 98-gun *Téméraire* joined the fray in her support. Lucas described the result of *Téméraire's* broadsides:

> It is impossible to describe the carnage produced by the murderous broadsides of this ship. More than two hundred of our brave men were killed or wounded by it. I was wounded also at the same time, but not so seriously as to make me abandon my post. Not being able to undertake anything on the side of the *Victory*, I now ordered the rest of the crew to man the batteries on the other side and fire at the *Téméraire* with what guns the collision ... had not dismounted.[20]

Lucas's report places the end of his part of the combat at 3:30pm, when *Redoutable* was so badly damaged that she no longer had the means to resist. At that point the 74-gun British *Swiftsure* took his ship in tow, and a different battle began: the struggle to keep *Redoutable* afloat. That battle went on through the night and into the following day. Finally, around seven in the evening and in the midst of the post-battle storm, *Redoutable* sank, taking a considerable number of her wounded with her. Lucas's opinion of her crew was brief and unreserved: '[T]he whole history of our navy can show nothing like them.'[21]



Benjamin West's painting shows Nelson struck down on the deck of his flagship. The significance of the moment is such that the battle itself seems of secondary importance as the stunned audience regard their fallen leader. (Royal Naval Museum)

THE CARNAGE ENDS

The 74-gun French ship *Achille*, sometimes confused with the British *Achilles*, played a special role in the battle of Trafalgar. Initially, the French *Achille* was the thirtieth ship in the Combined Fleet's line. As the battle unfolded, she had engaged the 74-gun *Revenge*, the 74-gun *Defiance*, the 74-gun *Swiftsure*, and the 64-gun *Polyphemus*. In the action, *Revenge* inflicted fatal damage to *Achille* with repeated raking fire into the Frenchman's bow.

As the afternoon wore on, the French *Achille's* officers and crew were decimated, and she was under the command of a junior officer. Finally, one of the last ships in Collingwood's line, the 98-gun *Prince*, fired two broadsides into the stricken ship's stern, bringing down her mainmast and mizzenmast and starting an uncontrollable fire. Late in the afternoon she blew up, providing the final, violent punctuation to the day's carnage.

It was approximately five in the afternoon when the firing stopped, and a post-battle silence settled over the scene. Smoke and the smell of burned gunpowder lingered. Bodies and debris from shattered ships floated in the water. Eighteen ships of the Combined Fleet had been sunk or captured; many of those were subsequently wrecked in the storm that immediately followed the battle. No British ships were sunk or captured.

Two of the ships captured by the British later escaped. The French 74-gun *Algeçiras* was taken over by a British prize crew during the battle, but when the storm struck, the prisoners were released to help save the ship. With great skill the British-French crew managed to struggle into Cadiz, where roles were reversed; the British became the prisoners. The Spanish 120-gun *Santa Ana* and the 80-gun *Neptuno* were retaken two days after the battle by a French-Spanish squadron that ventured out of Cadiz to counterattack against the battle-damaged and storm-battered British ships nearby, but *Neptuno* was subsequently wrecked. Fifteen French and Spanish ships escaped, most with considerable damage, but within slightly more than a month after the battle, Captain Sir Richard Strachan captured four French ships that had been among the 15 that escaped from the Battle.

After the Battle, *Victory* eventually reached Gibraltar, where she was refitted. On 3 November she sailed for England with Nelson's body, which was interred under the Great Dome of St Paul's Cathedral, after one of the most memorable state funerals in history.

The toll in human suffering was immense. British estimates of casualties published in the *London Gazette* were 449 killed and 1,214 wounded. The Combined Fleet suffered much heavier casualties; more than 4,400 were killed, and more than 2,500 were wounded. In addition, almost 4,800 officers and men from the French-Spanish Fleet were captured. One of the indicators of the human toll within the Combined Fleet can be established by extrapolating the fate of its six admirals. The commander-in-chief French Admiral Villeneuve, was captured, and his second in command Spanish Admiral Gravina was grievously wounded and escaped to Cadiz. Spanish Vice-Admiral D'Alva was seriously wounded but

FATE OF THE COMBINED FLEET

Captured	*San Ildefonso* (Sp.) *San Juan Nepomuceno* (Sp.) *Bahama* (Sp.) *Swiftsure* (Fr.)
Captured, then wrecked	*Monarca* (Sp.) *Fougueux* (Fr.) *Bucentaure* (Fr.) *Berwick* (Fr.)
Captured, then burned	*Aigle* (Fr.) *Intrépide* (Fr.) *San Augustín* (Sp.)
Captured, then sank	*Santísima Trinidad* (Sp.) *Redoutable* (Fr.)
Captured, then scuttled	*Argonauta* (Sp.)
Captured, then escaped	*Algésiras* (Sp.)
Captured, then re-taken	*Santa Ana* (Sp.)
Captured, re-taken, then wrecked	*Neptuno* (Sp.)
Sunk in action	*Achille* (Fr.)
Escaped	*Argonaute* (Sp.) *Pluton* (Fr.) *San Justo* (Sp.) *San Leandro* (Sp.) *Neptune* (Fr.) *Héros* (Fr.) *Príncipe de Asturias* (Sp.) *Montañes* (Sp.)
Escaped, then wrecked	*El Rayo* (Sp.) *San Francisco de Asisi* (Sp.) *Indomptable* (Fr.)
Escaped, then captured *(captured in action by Sir Richard Strachan on 4 November in the Bay of Biscay off the Spanish coast)*	*Formidable* (Fr.) *Mont-Blanc* (Fr.) *Scipion* (Fr.) *Duguay-Trouin* (Fr.)

also escaped to Cadiz, and Spanish Rear-Admiral Cisneros was captured. French Rear-Admiral Magón was killed, and French Rear-Admiral Dumanoir escaped.

IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH

One might wonder why Collingwood did not anchor at the end of the day. Nelson's signal to 'Prepare to Anchor after the close of day' was meant for the entire fleet, and Collingwood would have been inclined to carry out the intentions of his fallen leader and good friend. Collingwood, as Nelson, knew what the heavy swells that had been rolling in from the west meant; a very serious storm was headed in his direction. Yet, for the most part, he did not follow Nelson's order to anchor the fleet. Why?

The answer to that question lies in the circumstances of the post-battle storm. When confronted by a serious storm, there are two basic reactions to evaluate. The first involves anchoring as securely as possible in as protected an area as possible and hoping you can ride out the storm. The problem with this alternative is that your fate hangs on how well protected your anchorage is, your anchor holding, and your ground tackle standing up. The second alternative involves getting as far out to sea as possible and taking advantage of the sea room to manoeuvre your ship through the storm. The danger of the second approach is that your ship can be simply overwhelmed by the elements and sunk.

Collingwood, who had no well-protected port to flee to, chose, in general, to try to get his ships as far off the land as possible. One of the determining factors was the poor condition of many of his ships and virtually all of the prizes. During the battle anchors were smashed and ground tackle was obliterated in many of the ships, making it simply impossible to anchor at all, let alone anchor securely. Further supporting his decision was the proximity of a dangerous lee shore towards which the storm was driving him. On the 22 October, Collingwood wrote to the secretary of the Board of Admiralty William Marsden:

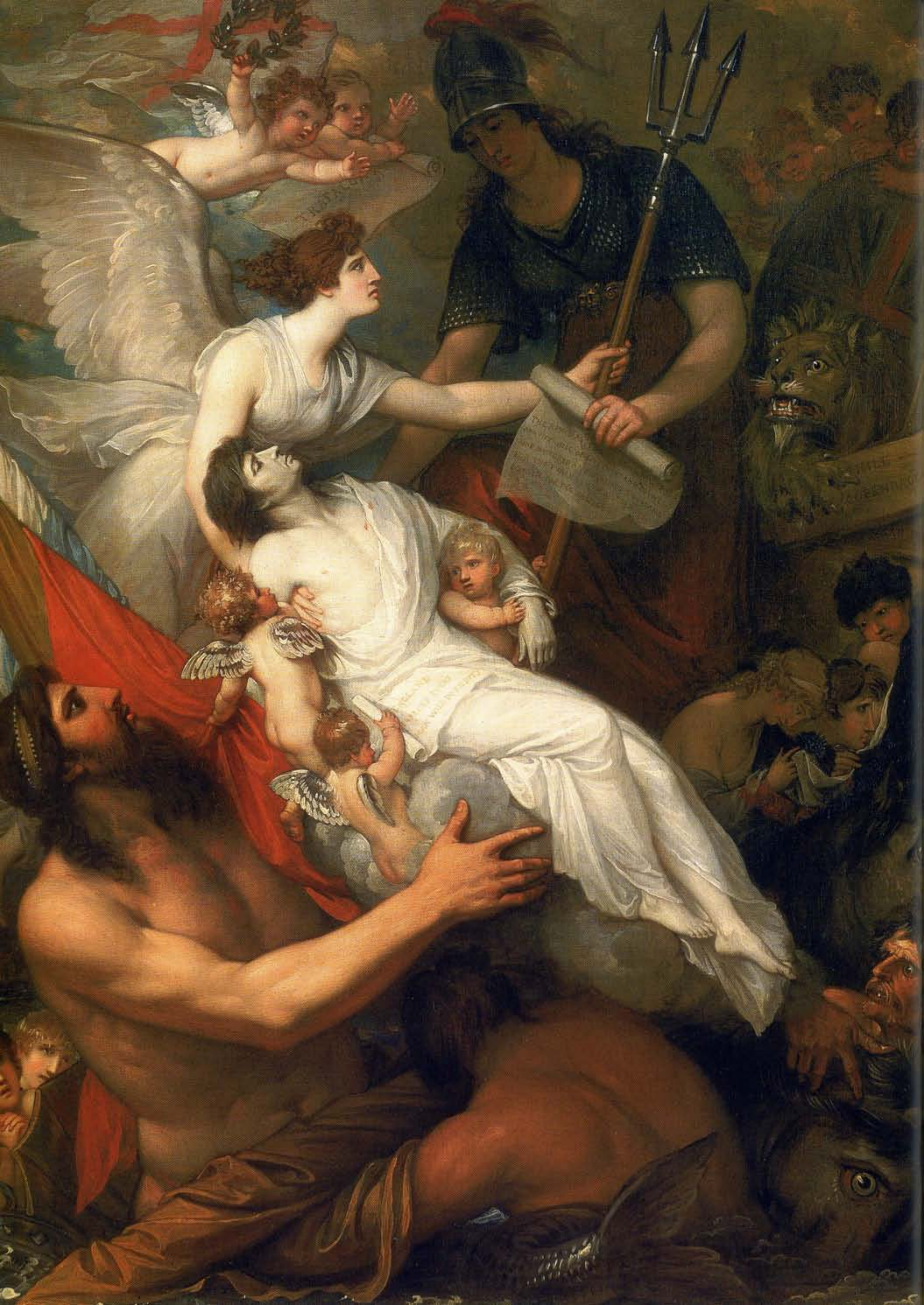
> [I]t having blown a gale of wind ever since the Action, I have not yet had it in my power to collect any reports from the Ships.... After the Action I shifted my flag to her [the frigate *Euryalus*], that I might more easily communicate my orders to, and collect the Ships, and towed the Royal Sovereign out to seaward. The whole fleet was now in a very perilous situation. Many ships were dismasted; all shattered; in thirteen fathoms water, off the shoals of Trafalgar; and when I made the signal to prepare to anchor, few of the ships had an Anchor to let go, their cables being shot; but the same good Providence which aided us through such a day preserved us in the night, by the wind shifting a few points, and drifting the ships off the land, except four of the captured dismasted Ships, which are now at anchor off Trafalgar, and I hope will ride safe until those gales are over.[22]

THE FINAL PERSPECTIVE

By 26 October, Collingwood was able to detach the sloop HMS *Pickle*, commanded by Lieutenant John Lapenotière, from the fleet with the report of the battle to government in London. Lapenotière and his tiny ship fought their way through gales and heavy seas and arrived at Falmouth on 4 November. From there, the young officer raced to London by coach. He arrived at Whitehall in the early hours of 6 November and turned his dispatches over to the Secretary to the Board of the Admiralty with a sailor's blunt report: 'Sir, we have gained a great victory. But we have lost Lord Nelson.'

History has established a much more far-reaching evaluation of the battle of Trafalgar than Lapenotière. And none is more accurate than that of American sea power prophet A. T. Mahan. In 1897, then-Captain Mahan concluded his biography *The Life of Nelson* with a chapter on the Battle of Trafralgar, in which he wrote:

> There were, indeed, consequences momentous and stupendous yet to flow from the decisive supremacy of Great Britain's sea-power, the establishment of which, beyond all question or competition, was Nelson's great achievement; but his part was done when Trafalgar was fought. The coincidence of this death with the moment of completed success has impressed upon that superb battle a stamp of finality, an immortality of fame, which even its own grandeur scarcely could have insured.[23]



CHAPTER EIGHT

NELSON AND TRAFALGAR: THE LEGACY

PROFESSOR ANDREW LAMBERT

Although it was a truly decisive battle, the consequences and significance of Trafalgar, and the meaning of the hero who died in the moment of victory, have been hotly debated. Trafalgar would give Britain command of the oceans for the next hundred years and was immediately marked out as the ideal naval victory. Yet for most this was simply a matter of how many ships were taken, rather than a demonstration of the highest intellectual and professional qualities. Admiral Sir Robert Calder was judged to have botched his action with Villeneuve off Cape Finisterre on 22 July 1805, not because of a failure to take more enemy ships, but because he did not transform his initial success into strategically significant results. This failure to identify the true meaning of Trafalgar was part of the process that saw Nelson portrayed as hero or god, rather than naval genius.

Because he succeeded so completely, and then died at the moment of victory, Nelson closed an era in world history and made Trafalgar magical. Trafalgar transcended the details of what happened to become the talisman of the nation, and a standard of success to which all must aspire. It gave the Royal Navy a unique status, closer to religion than reason, one that would be contested, but not countermanded.

STRATEGIC CONSEQUENCES

The morning after Trafalgar the world was a different place. The art of war at sea had been raised to a level of insight, leadership, daring and commitment that can never be excelled. Trafalgar was the ultimate expression of war at sea under sail, distilling and refining everything that had gone before into an irresistible compound. By his inspirational leadership, and genius for communicating Nelson had enabled a fleet, many of whose captains he hardly knew, to adopt radically new tactics, and use them to decide the hardest-fought naval battle of

OPPOSITE
The Immortality of Nelson by Benjamin West. This painting used classical imagery to mark the elevation of the hero to an imaginary pantheon of the gods. Although this jarred with Nelson's own simple Christian faith, it suited the national mood. (National Maritime Museum).

the age. He had focused his eye on the decisive point, leading the attack that destroyed the enemy's command and control, smashed their formation, and set up the battle of annihilation he had sought.

But this was only the tactical perspective. The purpose of Nelson's tactics had been, as ever, to advance the strategic needs of the theatre and the conflict. He did not restrict his horizons to winning battles: rather he was concerned to translate battle victories into successful campaigns and wars. Villeneuve had made a serious mistake coming out to sea, he had exposed a key French strategic asset, the combined fleet that could attack British trade and possessions, her Mediterranean ally Naples, or simply remain 'in being' to sustain the almost unbearable tension and pressure of the invasion scare. Once the enemy was at sea Nelson had to annihilate them, to make them pay for their temerity. The final complication to be addressed in his planning was the knowledge that a storm would break that night, an insight based on his assessment of the meteorological evidence. He had to finish the job in an afternoon.

Nelson's achievement, reinforced by the subsequent allied sortie, Strachan's capture of Dumanoir's four fugitives, and Duckworth's annihilation of Lessigue's squadron, destroyed the naval power that gave credence to Napoleon's invasion threat. Britain's command of the sea had been placed beyond doubt. Nelson knew that, once the British Empire and its trade was safe, it could prosper and expand, creating wealth and funding the war. It was time to translate naval power into strategic success.

However, the fruits of Trafalgar would take a decade to harvest. Within weeks Napoleon had transformed the European balance of power by smashing the Austro-Russian army at Austerlitz, within a year he had repeated the process at Jena/Auerstadt and Eylau. With Austria and Prussia cowed into submission and Russia a reluctant ally, Napoleon set up his Continental System, an economic blockade of Britain, excluding British trade from the Continent. With his fleet gone, Napoleon looked to extend his empire across the Continent, his gaze still fixed on the east. When Naples, the destination of Villeneuve's ill-fated sortie, fell to a French army it seemed that Bonaparte was invincible. Yet his power had been circumscribed, his ultimate fate already mapped out.

The British responded to Napoleon's Continental System with their own blockade of Europe, the 'Orders in Council', which, as Nelson had stressed, made the Continent suffer the cost of French occupation, and prompted rebellion. To sustain absolute naval command, any flickering naval threats were swiftly crushed, the Danish and Portuguese navies were removed from the board by British action in 1807, the still numerous Spanish fleet by a French invasion of their country. Bounded by naval might, Napoleon was unable to escape the confines of Europe, or sustain his empire of plunder and conquest. British aid, financial and military, revived the downtrodden peoples in Spain, Portugal, Italy and Germany. British trade, secured by Nelson's victory, funded the war that destroyed the French Empire, and the Industrial Revolution that fuelled the next century of British power.

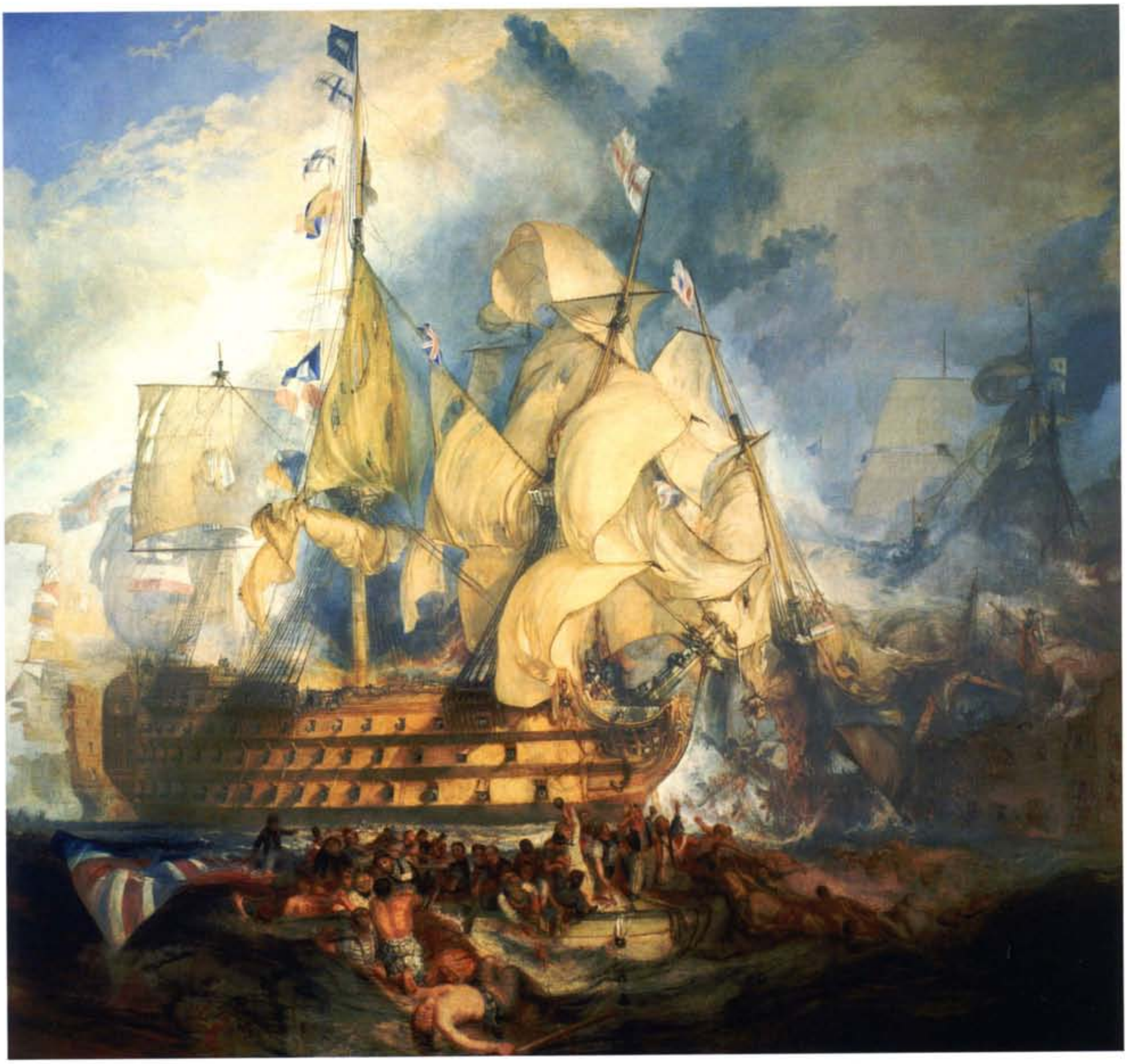
Having destroyed the French fleet, the Royal Navy was reconfigured for a new war. With the residue of French seapower tightly blockaded in Brest, Toulon and Antwerp, British task forces swept up the last remnants of the French and Dutch overseas empires, boosting trade and ending the threat to shipping. Insurance rates fell. British cruisers shifted to the offensive: offshore islands and convoys were swept up, coastal towns attacked and the Spanish rising against the French sustained and reinforced. As Napoleon observed, while a prisoner on board HMS *Bellerophon*: 'If it had not been for you English, I should have been Emperor of the East. But wherever there is water to float a ship, we are sure to find you in our way.'[1] The French could only respond by pouring treasure and manpower into coastal defences and telegraph systems to counter the omnipotent Royal Navy. Emboldened by their success, the British became ever more aggressive, pushing their attacks to the point of foolhardiness, relying on reputation to make up for impossible odds. In 1813 Nelson's protégé William Hoste, not content with a superb naval victory at Lissa, used his sailors to haul heavy cannons to the top of Dalmatian mountains, to capture key fortresses!

In 1814, Napoleon, the military colossus, would be beaten by the armies of the European states, by Russia, Prussia and Austria, with the support of the British, Spanish and Portuguese effort in the Iberian Peninsula, but this was only possible because Britain never gave up the conflict, never allowed Napoleon the opportunity to consolidate his power and rebuild the Continent in his own image. Trafalgar was the beginning of the end.

TACTICS

Trafalgar completed a decade of remarkable change in naval tactical thinking. With Nelson at the forefront of the process, the old ideas based on the rigid linear thinking of the 17th century were abandoned. Nelson did not abandon the old tactics because they were wrong, but because against unskilled foes anxious to avoid battle they were unnecessary, and risked losing scarce opportunities to impose combat. The old systems remained enshrined in the formal tactical orders, but they were largely ignored for the duration of the war. However, the revolution was not one of fixed ideas, but of flexible, responsive tactics, meeting each situation with the best approach. As if to prove the point, the only officer to copy Nelson's Trafalgar tactics was Commodore Dubordieu, leading a Franco-Venetian squadron at the battle of Lissa in 1811. His bold two-column attack was shattered by the accurate and sustained gunnery of William Hoste's far smaller British force. In an action between fleets of equal ability, the Trafalgar tactics would always fail, Nelson or no. Nelson's genius was to know when to take such risks.

With the old tactical order changing, ships were modified to fight in the new mêlée battles. When the *Victory* arrived at Chatham for repairs, Master Shipwright Robert Seppings recognized the need to build stronger bows, to protect the crew from the terrible raking fire. His answer was to carry the same heavy structural timbers and planking right round the bow up to the upper deck,



In his painting of *The Battle of Trafalgar*, J. M. W. Turner invested the battle with an intensity of meaning that few others have equalled. (National Maritime Museum)

with acutely angled gun ports to facilitate ahead fire. Later he would apply the same logic to the stern, replacing the vast, flimsy glazed structure with solid timber. After Trafalgar the wooden warship was re-engineered for all-round combat, and re-painted Nelson-fashion, with the chequer-board design his ships had adopted before the battle.

THE NATIONAL HERO

However, the astonishing victory that saved Britain from economic ruin and invasion, while laying the foundations of ultimate victory, was not celebrated: instead there was a day of national mourning on 5 December 1805. While the final destruction of the invasion threat was a relief for many, the cost had been too high. The triumph was dimmed by the death of the hero. In life Nelson had become the embodiment of the newly focused British national identity, an 'immortal' who gave his countrymen the courage to resist a continent in arms, and confidence in their ultimate success. He was the icon of the age, and as Lord Byron noted, 'Britannia's god of War'. No other hero has matched Nelson's engagement with his public. As the only man to stand between Britain and a French invasion, his death was greeted with shock and grief. Little wonder he was mourned. As society hostess Lady Bessborough explained:

> How glorious if it was not so cruelly damped by Nelson's death! How truly he has accomplished his prediction that when they meet it must be to extermination. To a man like him he could not have picked out a finer close to such a life. But what an irreparable loss to England! ... Courage and perseverance like his cannot be too highly honoured, and it will encourage others to follow his noble career of glory. I can think of nothing else, and hardly imagined it possible to feel so much grief for a Man I did not know... Think of being mourned by a whole Nation, and having my name carried down with gratitude and praise to the latest generations.[2]

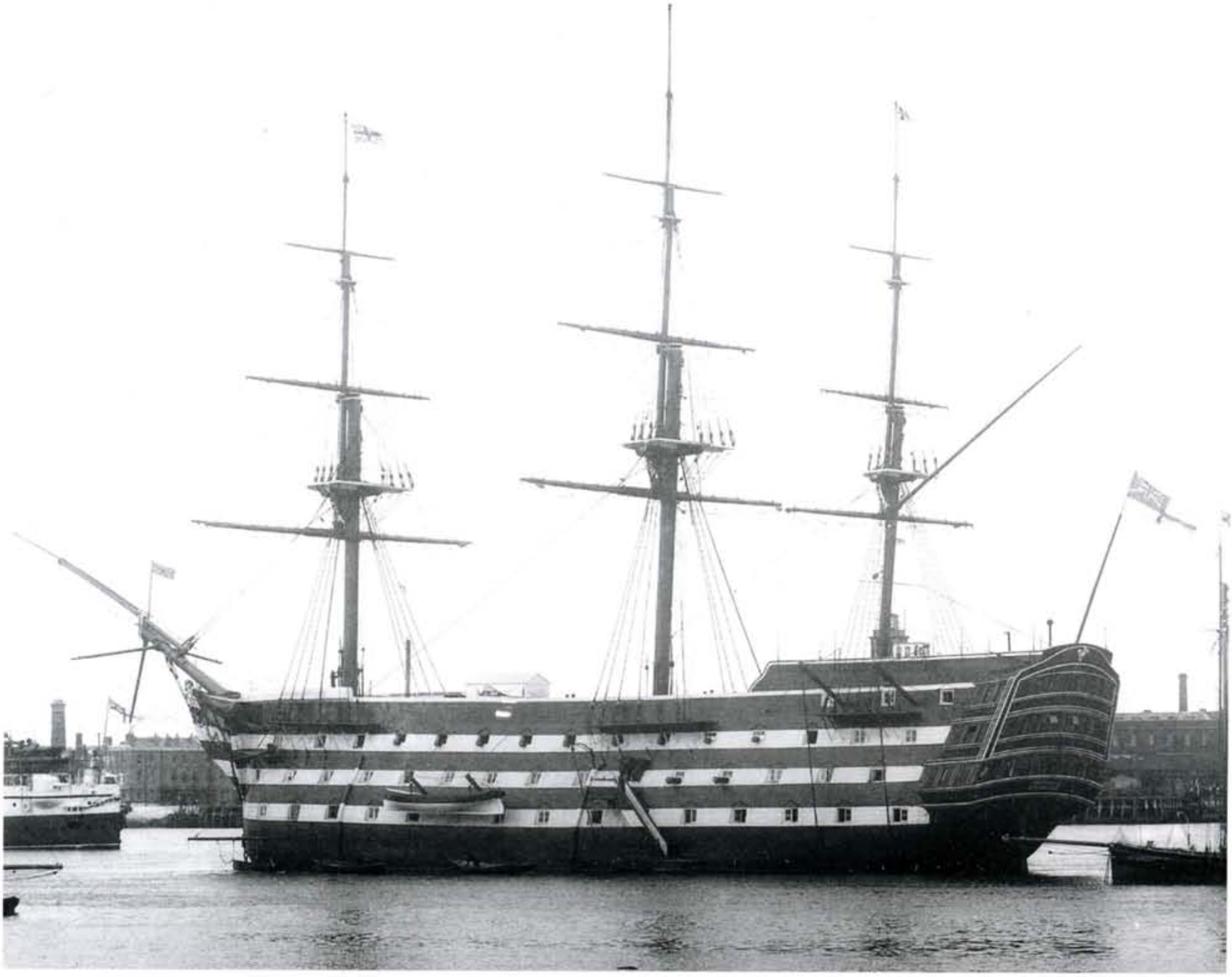
A few days later, Lady Bessborough realized the feeling was universal. 'Almost everybody wears a black crape scarf or cockade with Nelson written on it – this is almost general, high and low; indeed the enthusiasm is general beyond anything I ever saw.'[3] This was the first occasion for national grief, the first time that news had touched the newly created British consciousness. It would leave an indelible mark.

Because the nation had no one to replace the dead hero, he was buried in a way that captured his name and his indomitable spirit for the war effort. Hitherto naval heroes had been tucked away in dusty corners of Westminster Abbey, mixed up with poets and prelates: Nelson would be the first and greatest hero to be buried in St Pauls, cathedral of the City of London that so valued his work in securing global trade. He would be placed in the crypt, directly under the crossing, the central figure in a new national pantheon to ensure his name lived on and his example inspired future generations. His interment would be the most lavish and spectacular ever staged in Britain, because his country still needed him. This was no farewell, only translation to a new national role. A two-day funerary pageant on 8–9 January 1806 took his body by river from the Royal Naval Hospital at Greenwich to the Admiralty, and then on to St Paul's through immense crowds, who took off their hats and stood in silence as his mortal remains passed – unbidden, but eloquent testimony from the masses. By the time his coffin had been lowered into place, he had been deified, the war god of the British nation, the ultimate expression of the national effort.

His passing excited a massive artistic response. Arthur Devis, who took a passage on *Victory* when she left Spithead for Chatham presented the ship as a shrine, and the crew as disciples. His *The Death of Nelson* captured the moment when the mortal hero was transfigured into a divine being, it also secured Joshua Boydell's 500 guinea prize for the best death scene.[4] The series of 'death' paintings closed with Benjamin *West's The Immortality of Nelson* of 1807, with Nelson, posed as the dead Christ carried in arms of victory to a mourning Minerva, while Neptune watches. The signal 'England expects', gives the picture a motto.[5] The combination of sacred and profane imagery, Christ, Roman deities and a mortal man was irreligious, if not blasphemous. There were some in the Church who recognized the danger. The new secular faith, the cult of the hero, was a real threat to organized religion.

A national response required a truly great artist. J. M. W. Turner went on board the *Victory* at Chatham, beginning a lifelong attempt to explain the meaning of Trafalgar. Few artists have had such a strongly developed sense of their national role, or lived in an era that had such need of them. Turner had already recognized in Nelson the genius that would make him the national hero.[6] Trafalgar took the subject and the artist to new levels, using the sea and the great warships to define British resistance. His first picture of 1806 took an unconventional perspective, viewing the moment the fatal shot was fired from high in the *Victory's* rigging.[7] Trafalgar was a subject Turner would return to in the 1820s, before achieving his own immortality with *The Fighting Téméraire* of 1837. His pictures are the ultimate expression of Nelson's impact on his age, romantic hero, national symbol and war god. Beside Turner's compositions all other Trafalgar pictures appear pale, literal and short of meaning.

By 1815 naval officers had become popular heroes, in life and fiction. The men who fought alongside Nelson were lionized, while their fictional alter egos, in the new literary genre created by Captain Frederick Marryat, were used to teach moral lessons. While the impulse was romantic, the underlying idea reflected the rising power of the professional classes. The Reform Act of 1832 gave political power to middle-class men, and changed the nature of leadership. The new leaders were professionals, their status based on competence, not birth. They were part of a new culture of service, and their patron saint would be the apparently self-made hero Nelson.[8] Contemporary heroes were consciously compared to those from medieval literature,[9] and throughout the 19th century this would be the ultimate accolade for any warrior. Unfortunately this trend was also profoundly anti-intellectual, valuing character over ability.[10] This may explain the lack of any worthwhile attempt to analyze Nelson's professional legacy, as distinct from his personal life and character. The great Nelson debates of the century were about morality, character and honour, it simply did not matter that he was a genius. The new age did not appreciate vainglorious display: the Victorians found something vulgar in Nelson's public appearances, and the pleasure he took in his celebrity. They judged him by their standards, and not those of his own era. The origins of his behaviour were too complex for an age that preferred simple narrative to analytical insight. The nation needed a hero, the Navy an example, and no one needed to trouble their heads to think,

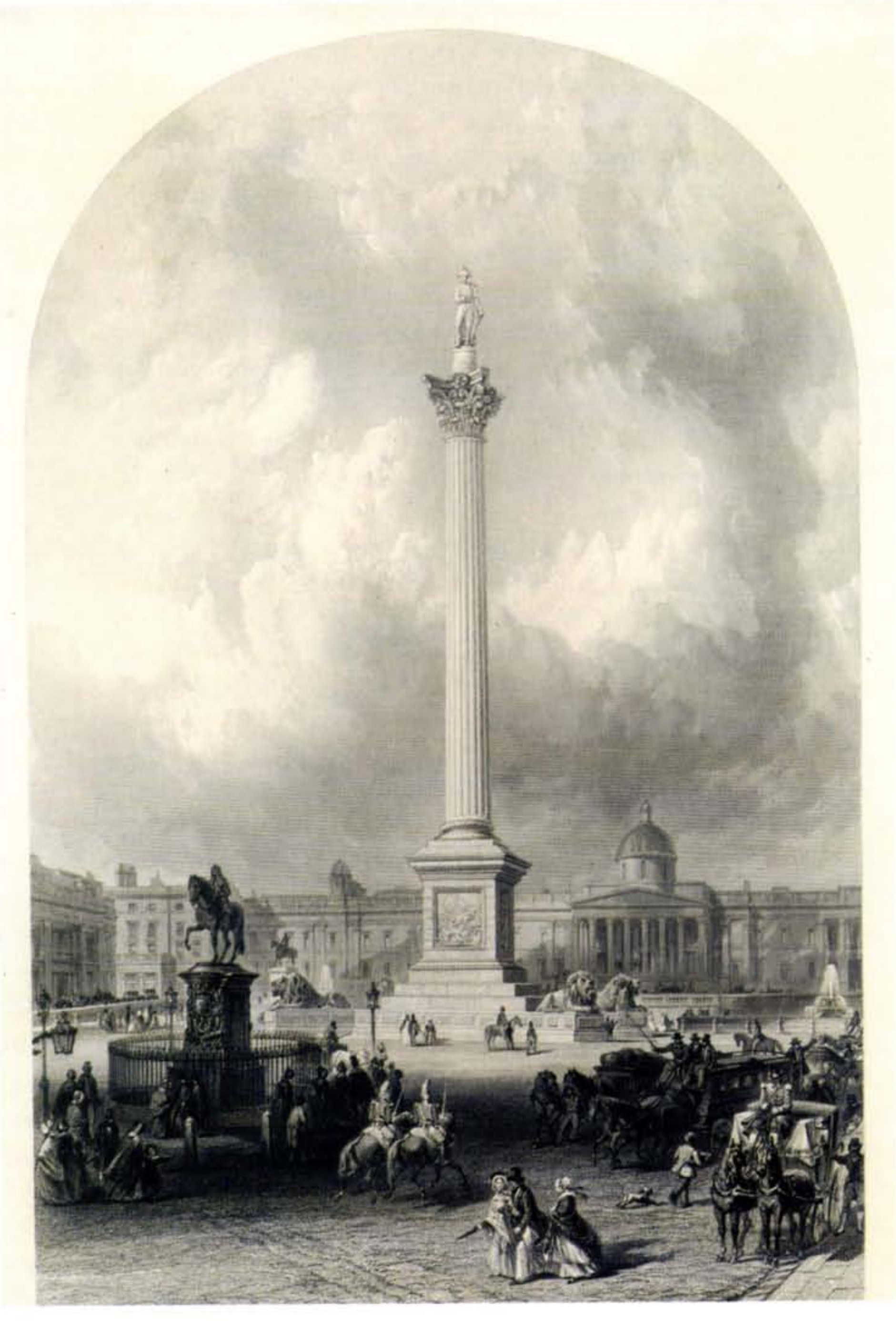


While Nelson was placed, god-like on his column, his ship, the *Victory*, so aptly named, would be accorded the ultimate accolade not only of preservation for posterity but to continue as the oldest serving ship in the Royal Navy. (Royal Naval Museum)

they could simply repeat the mantra. Thus Nelson, in whose brilliant mind the complex and demanding business of war was made simple for his followers, was reduced to the level of a parody, spouting nonsensical platitudes like: 'never mind tactics, always go at them'.

This anti-intellectual, idealized approach dominated the gallery at the Royal Naval Hospital, Greenwich that became the artistic shrine to the immortal memory. Begun in 1823, the collection consciously attempted to cover Britain's rise to naval glory.[11] In 1829 George IV handed over Turner's overwhelming *Trafalgar*. Later Prince Albert donated the bloodstained coat. Responses to the collection varied. Most read the history lesson in a conventional manner, as a shrine recording their rise to world-empire. Seen in this light, a preference for the literal was only to be expected. The nation knew exactly what Nelson meant. He had given them the empire of the world, its trade flowed past the building. However, that much-travelled seaman and storyteller Herman Melville visited

The significance of the victory at Trafalgar for a seafaring nation is exemplified by the fact that a British admiral was elevated on a monument that made even royal monuments pale in comparison. (Mary Evans Picture Library)



the Painted Hall in 1849 and, fascinated by the blood-stained coat,[12] Melville caught the meaning of the man, and Nelson became a powerful presence in his later work. He stood out against the Victorian tendency to treat Nelson literally, where a concern with fact and form invited unthinking responses.

The process of establishing Nelson as the national deity was completed by the erection of a monument in central London. Although the House of Commons had discussed the issue in 1816, nothing was done. Clearing away the slums, stables and warren of lanes between Charing Cross, St Martin in the Fields, Whitehall and St James's provided a suitable space, and the addition of the National Gallery in the early 1830s provided a focal point, but it was only in 1835 that the space was named Trafalgar Square. The King, Nelson's old friend William, accepted the inevitable. After William's death in 1837, Wellington, Hardy and Cockburn led a committee to collect money for a memorial. William Railton's design used a column from Augustus' Temple of Mars Ultor (Mars the Avenger, or he who has the last word). Taken from a temple built at the heart of Imperial Rome to celebrate the deification of Julius Caesar and the avenging of his death, it linked him with the god of war and established an Imperial regime that would last forever.[13] The meaning was obvious: Nelson had become the national god of war, and the nation had avenged his death by defeating Napoleon. By the 1840s it was clear that Trafalgar had set the seal on Britain's naval mastery for all time, Nelson and an Augustan column provided the ultimate expression of global maritime power. The column and statue were in place by November 1843, 24 years later Landseer's bronze lions completed the design.[14] The impact of the column was, and remains, immense. Hitler saw it as the 'symbol of British naval might and world domination': he planned to take it back to Berlin if his invasion project had been more successful than Bonaparte's. However, British naval might was far more than a symbol, and he did not make the attempt.[15]

NAVAL LEGACY

Although Nelson was a unique genius, of unequalled penetration, judgement and insight, his professional legacy was immense. The Mediterranean command was taken up by his life-long friend Collingwood, who shared many of his finer qualities, if not his talent for communication, or his good fortune. Among the men of the next generation, few escaped the impact of Nelson. Among his many talented followers, William Hoste, another Norfolk parson's son, won a brilliant frigate battle off Lissa in 1811, flying the signal 'Remember Nelson'. Edward Codrington commanded the last sailing ship fleet battle, at Navarino on 20 October 1827. The solid, reliable Thomas Hardy went on to command fleets, and to serve as First Sea Lord, while George Cockburn orchestrated the capture of Washington in 1814 and ran the navy for many years after 1815. The last of Nelson's followers was Sir William Parker, twice Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, who died an Admiral of the Fleet in 1866. They were only the best known among many, and the service continued to bear Nelson's stamp long into the 19th century. It was only with the coming of new technology, and the waning of the threat from France that Nelson began to lose his immediate relevance, gradually becoming an ideal to be followed and no longer an inspiration.

In the Crimean War (1854–56) the Russians were so frightened of the Royal Navy that they stayed in harbour, deceived by Admiral Lyons, a slight, grey-haired officer who fancied he looked like Nelson, and persuaded *The Times* that he was suitably energetic. In truth the only character trait Lyons shared with Nelson was vanity.[16] Fortunately Britain did not need a real Nelson to deal with Russia. Thereafter the constant demands posed by shifting technology and the uncertainty surrounding the future of war at sea deprived officers of the opportunity to reflect on the intellectual demands of their profession. With few and small wars, the route to promotion lay through mastery of the new guns, torpedoes and engineering systems. Nelson was slowly transformed from an example into a mantra, his incisive and sophisticated tactical concepts, invariably determined by strategic circumstances, and grand strategic objectives, were boiled down into mindless aggression. Little wonder the real meaning of Trafalgar was lost, and so many naval leaders of the late 19th and early 20th centuries failed to meet the demands of war.

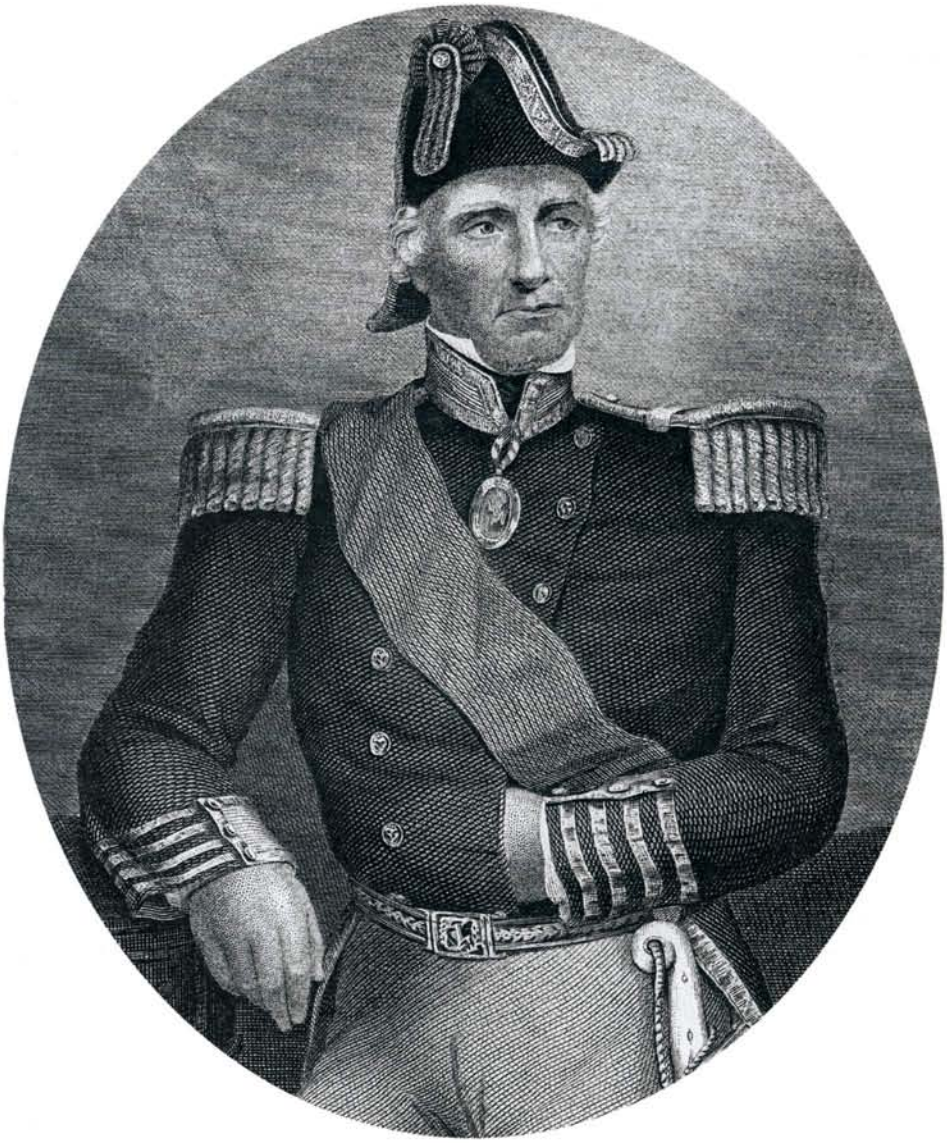
By the 1890s steam ships and sophisticated flag signalling systems allowed Admirals to control the detailed movements of their fleets, an opportunity which most exploited to reduce their captains to unthinking ship drivers. In 1893 Admiral Sir George Tryon, who ironically had attempted to break this vicious system, became its victim after he had issued a mistaken order. Because the second-in-command lacked the confidence or common sense to question the order, Tryon's flagship, *Victoria*, was rammed and sunk and Sir George's last words were said to have been 'It is all my fault'.

THE FRENCH PERSPECTIVE

While the Spanish accepted the judgement of Trafalgar, and celebrated the glory earned by Gravina and his heroic followers, Imperial France was anxious to suppress the news from the south. With Bonaparte still halfway between Ulm and Austerlitz, and Prussia pressing his flank, he dared not show any sign of weakness. Consequently Trafalgar passed without comment in the official press, but Bonaparte would never forgive Villeneuve. After a brief captivity in England, among men who admired his dignity, courage and lack of bombast, Villeneuve returned to France. He was murdered at Rennes, to remove an embarrassing reminder of Bonaparte's failure.

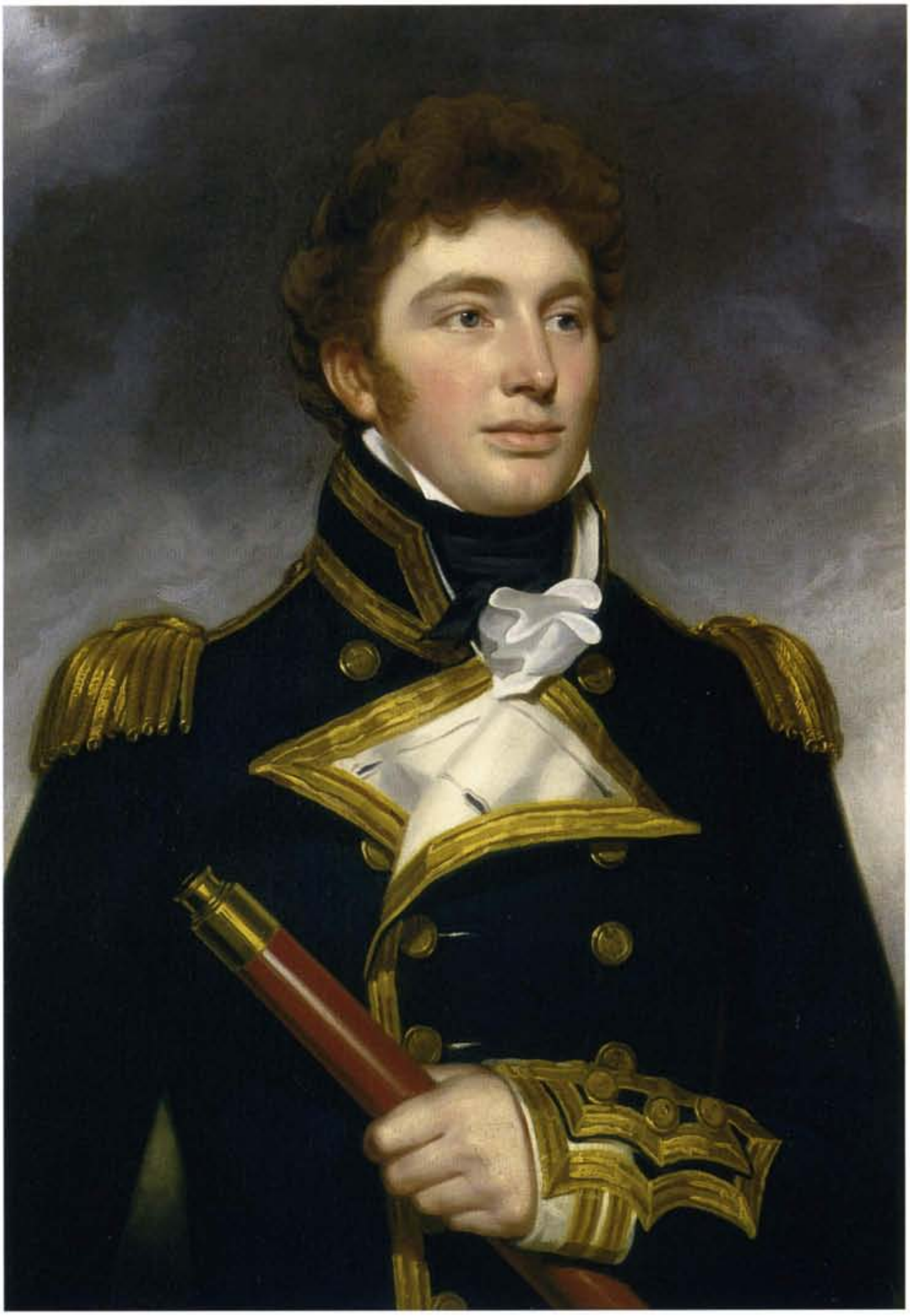
After the downfall of Bonaparte, the restored Bourbon government was prepared to ask why the French navy had been beaten so often and what it was that made Nelson the ideal commander. In an attempt to comprehend the basis of Britain's success in war, industry and trade, the French Government commissioned an official study from leading academician Charles Dupin. The second instalment of Dupin's *Voyages dans la Grand-Bretagne*, published in 1821, was devoted to the Royal Navy. Dupin stressed that the French did not use their naval forces in the same way as the British. For the French, strategic objectives invariably took precedence over tactical considerations, consequently battle did not occupy the central place that it was accorded by the British. Dupin offered a priceless insight into the greatness of Nelson. He recognized the vital role of 'mission-analysis', and argued that Nelson:

> ought to be held up as a pattern for admirals, by the extreme pains he took to impress upon his flag-officers and captains, the spirit of



Admiral Lord Lyons could call on the spirit of Nelson to cow his enemies during the Crimean War. There would come a time, however, when the Navy's failure to turn the spirit of Nelson's navy into practical action would lead it into dangerous waters. (Royal Naval Museum)

the enterprises which he resolved to undertake. He unfolded to them his general plan of operations, and the modifications with which the weather, or the manoeuvres of the enemy, might force him to qualify his original design. When once he had explained his system to the flag and superior officers of his fleet, he confided to them the charge of acting according to circumstances, so as to lead, in the most favourable manner, to the consummation of the enterprise thus planned. And Nelson, who was allowed to choose the companions of his glory, possessed the talent and the happiness to find men worthy of his instruction and confidence; they learnt, in action, to supply what had escaped his forethought, and in success, to surpass even his hopes.[17]



The fighting spirit of Nelson was embodied by several of his successors, not least William Hoste, another son of Norfolk, who won a brilliant victory at the battle of Lissa in 1811. (National Maritime Museum)

There is no better appreciation of Nelson's genius in contemporary literature, nor one so close to the modern understanding of 'mission-analysis' as the basis of tactical excellence.

Twenty-five years later, another Frenchman examined the professional side of Nelson's life. As a sea officer and the son of a Napoleonic Admiral, Captain Jurien de la Gravière found a rich haul of evidence in the Nicolas edition of

Nelson's correspondence. He emphasized Nelson's prodigious energy and uncommon valour, placing his astonishing seamanship above military daring. It was the combination of professional enthusiasm, exemplified by Nelson, with political commitment to sustained and ample funding that gave Britain victory in the long war at sea.[18] That de la Gravière's analysis was, like Dupin's, worthy of translation, reveals much about the relative poverty of British attempts to analyze Nelson's intellectual legacy. It was as if the very idea of an intellectual warrior was unacceptable, and the task should be left to foreign writers. The standard naval history of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, by the lawyer-turned-historian William James, was content to cite Dupin.[19] Nor did things improve thereafter; whole volumes examined Nelson's character, attributing his success to energy, enthusiasm and patriotism. The tendency in British literature was always to explain the success by studying the man. It was so much easier than trying to fathom the depths of a remarkable intellect, and a unique naval mind. By focusing on the humdrum and the human, British Nelson studies demeaned the subject by treating him as popular literature: there was very little professional study. The French, by contrast, wanted to understand and took the trouble to think about underlying principles.

IN PRIVATE

Because Nelson was so much more than an admiral, his private life was a fit subject for comment even in his lifetime. That he chose an unconventional existence added a frisson of scandal to his celebrity, and opened a line of attack on his character as the moral climate of succeeding generations hardened. In the 20th century a different construction, the 'romantic' Nelson, was built, and much of his fame reflected his relationship with Emma Hamilton.

REVIVAL

The high Victorian decades of peace and prosperity, in which the very name of Nelson withered away, could not last The growth of rival fleets ended the long career of Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone, who resigned in 1894 rather than accept increased naval spending. In 1893, anticipating this seismic shift in political opinion, naval historian Professor John Knox Laughton and the Director of Naval Intelligence, Captain Cyprian Bridge, founded the Navy Records Society. Their purpose was to publish critical material from the naval past to help develop doctrine and education for the modern Navy. Their target audience included statesmen, princes, newspaper writers and creators of popular culture. Through the Records Society, the Navy moved away from the amateurish, careless attitude to the past that had characterized the preceding 70 years, and began to draw on the wealth of hard-won experience that lay in Admiralty archives and private collections. Much of the intellectual force behind the development of war-planning and tactics was historical. Nelson was everywhere: his 'Trafalgar Memorandum' the key paper in a compilation distributed to the fleet to encourage modern officers to think about the next war.

Laughton also worked with American naval officer and theorist Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, who used Nelson as 'the embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain', to teach naval strategy by example. Mahan's 1897 *Life of Nelson* showed how Nelson used 'Sea Power' to decisive effect. The book was large, and written in a ponderous, stately style that found a welcome audience in an era without television, radio or other distractions for long dark evenings. Having commanded sailing warships, and seen active service in the American Civil War, Mahan combined his theoretical ideas with practical experience. Mahan's book also prompted a revival of the hostile comments on Nelson's conduct at Naples in 1799.[20] Using the methods of the newly professional study of naval history, Laughton and Mahan defeated these attacks.

By 1900 Laughton had made the Royal Navy historically aware, and taken the past into the core of naval thinking. In the process he had created a discipline, and a professional body, brought together the new profession of historian and the old one of sea-service, assembling the great and good, the able and the industrious.

No sooner had Nelson's name been cleared of calumnies than the centenary of Trafalgar sparked a new debate on Nelson's tactics. Laughton passed the subject to his friend Julian Corbett, who provided masterful analyses of the Trafalgar campaign, British naval tactics and the application of maritime power in national strategy in the decade before the First World War. This was the culmination of the work begun back in the early 1890s, it gave the Navy a Nelson they could understand, and in *The Campaign of Trafalgar* a well-nigh perfect historical monograph and teaching text. Corbett's book linked the events of 1805 to current needs. Corbett was also a key member of John Fisher's Admiralty team, working on educational reforms and war planning.[21]

Just how much Corbett's work was needed became obvious during the 1907 discussion of the invasion threat, by politicians, admirals and generals. Their historical understanding was so weak that both the army and the navy accepted that Nelson had been 'decoyed' to the West Indies by Villeneuve.[22] Little wonder the Navy was happy to accept the simplest of pasts, in which Nelson always attacked: this avoided the need to do as he had done, to think, reflect and analyze the demands of war at sea in the broadest context. Few bothered to ask any questions of their history. It was easier to follow orders, and as the systems for sending such orders improved, so the space in which Nelson had operated at Cape St Vincent, of anticipation, insight and judgement, was restricted by the ability of the commander-in-chief to issue precise instructions.[23] Nelson's legacy had been frittered away.

As the 20th century opened, Nelson mattered. Yet a sudden shift in Britain's international position crippled the commemoration of the centenary of Trafalgar. In 1904 Britain signed an Entente with France, an agreement to settle the squabbles of the past 30 years, allowing the two powers to co-operate in the face of growing German power. The Foreign Office was so concerned to avoid upsetting French sensitivities that official celebrations were effectively stifled, and the Admiralty ordered the fleet not to make any special display. The Fleet review was more Entente celebration than Trafalgar commemoration. Exactly who came up with the idea that we should forget our past merely to avoid upsetting the sensitivities of our current friends is unknown, but such feeble, apologetic nonsense did not show the country in a particularly positive light. Trafalgar is a matter of fact, the outcome is not contested.

The nation was still content to attribute Trafalgar to character and courage. It was his self-sacrifice that the Victorians and Edwardians found so ennobling about Nelson. His devotion to 'duty' chimed with the service ethic of the age, his Christian values were modernized to suit current tastes, quietly disposing of Emma in favour of more pious pronouncements. It helped that he was a popular hero, above class or clique, without a significant political role, and of course the sea was Britain's element.[24]

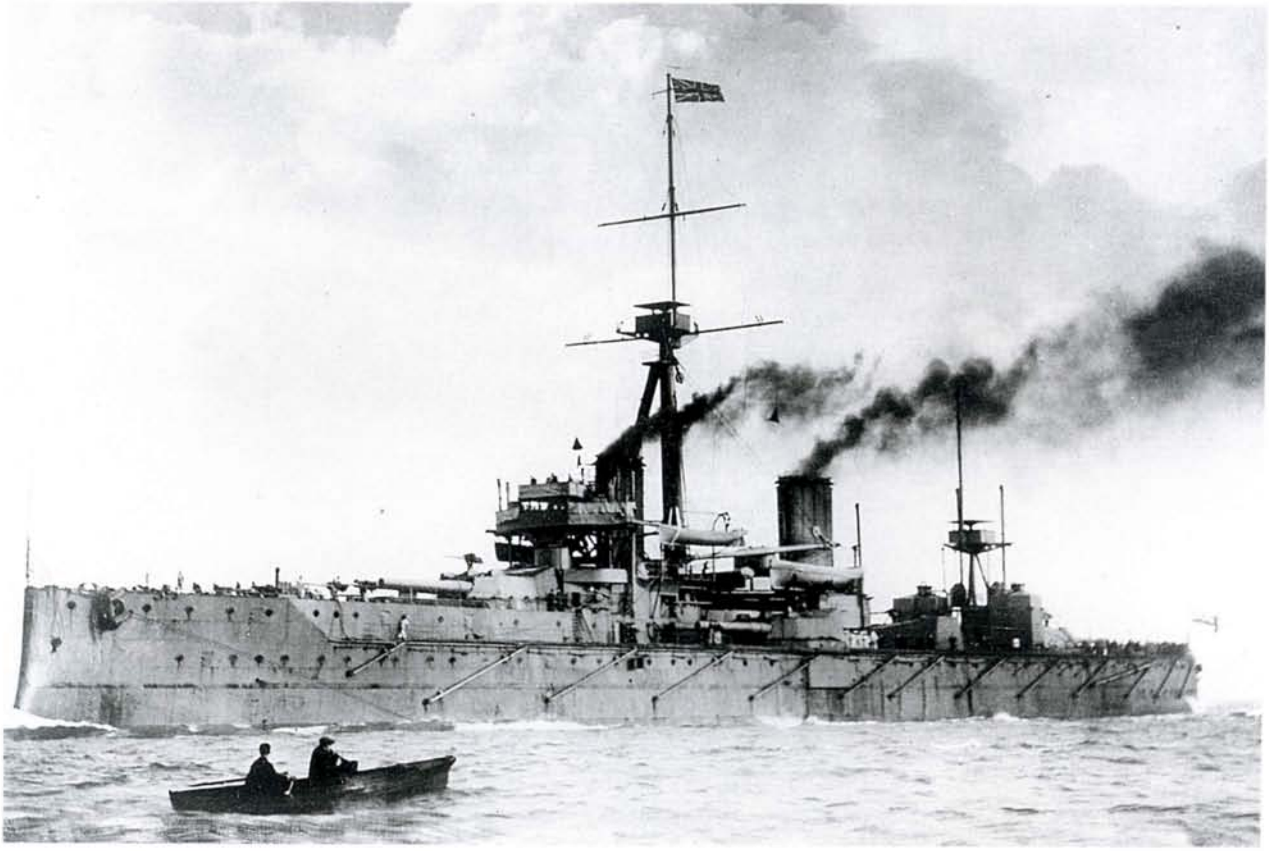
It was a mark of the failure of the Royal Navy to examine the past that the tactics used at Trafalgar were only formally studied in 1911. This process was stimulated by Corbett's work on the famous Trafalgar Memorandum of 9 October. The meaning of this paper has been much debated, and the Admiralty's minute investigation was published less than a year before the First World War broke out.[25] However, most analysts have missed the key point. The memorandum was not a free-standing document: it completed a process begun with verbal discussions in the Great Cabin of the *Victory*, on 29 and 30 September, when Nelson explained the 'Nelson Touch' to his captains. His concept was, as ever, to reduce the complex, demanding problem of arranging a fleet for battle, forcing the enemy to fight and securing a complete victory into a set of basic ideas that could be easily understood. The written version contained the intellectual fruits of a career dedicated to the pursuit and destruction of the enemy. It distilled the history, techniques and possibilities of sailing-fleet tactics through the prism of personal experience, and applied them to the situation he anticipated. It was not prescriptive: Nelson was the last admiral to preclude the effects of chance, initiative, individual impulse, human error or enemy action. As the philosopher of war Carl von Clausewitz stressed, no plans survive first contact with the enemy. Instead Nelson had given his captains a priceless insight into his intellectual process, a guide to the way he thought and the objects at which he aimed, together with the core concept of breaking the enemy formation in two places, to destroy two thirds of their fleet. Finally he reminded them that 'something must be left to chance' and added 'in case Signals can neither be seen nor perfectly understood, no Captain can do very wrong if he places his Ship alongside that of an Enemy.'[26] This last was the fall-back position for the 'blockheads', without the wit to think for themselves. It was the least he expected, not a mantra for success in battle. Experience had taught him that not all captains were equal, and he did not know enough of his new team to rely on them all. This was why he chose the ships that would be close to him in battle, all were commanded by men he knew and trusted.[27]

In rebuilding the Royal Navy in the Edwardian era, Admiral Sir John Fisher consciously re-used the names of ships that fought at Trafalgar. Consequently the fleet that fought at Jutland in 1916 sounded remarkably familiar, although the leadership lacked the genius and professionalism of the original. Fisher was consciously preparing for a second Trafalgar, although he preferred to use the magic of these great names to deter war, rather than having to defend the legacy on the field of battle.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

In 1914 the Royal Navy went to war with more ships, men and guns than the enemy, their confidence heightened by the knowledge that they were the heirs of Nelson. By contrast the magic of Trafalgar still oppressed the Germans, they would have to beat a bigger fleet, and Nelson too. It proved to be a burden the Kaiser's admirals could not shoulder. Buoyed up by an almost sublime

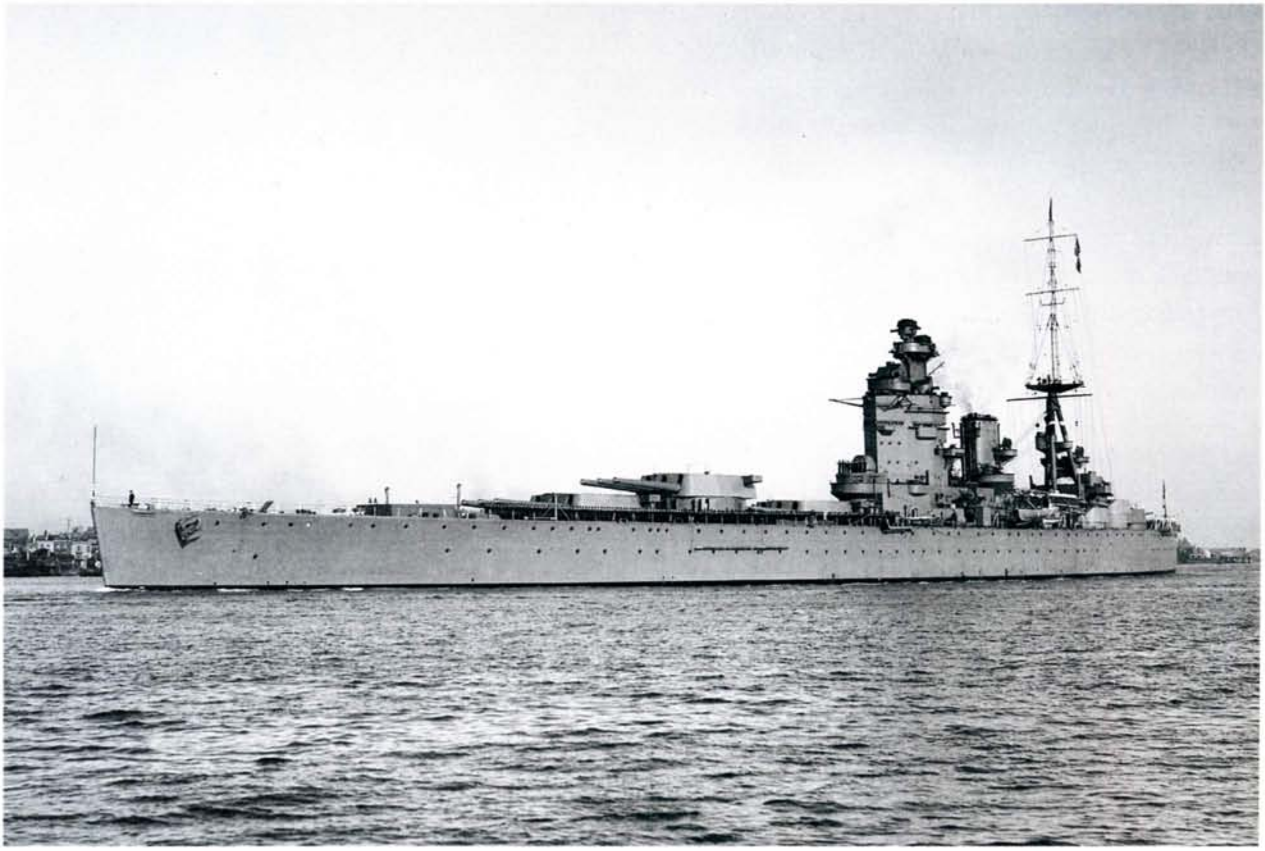
Admiral Lord Fisher rebuilt the navy and used the ship's names that were redolent of the Trafalgar era. The spell remained but British naval predominance now owed more to sheer numbers and size than to dash and daring. (Royal Naval Museum)



HMS *Dreadnought*, named for a ship that fought at Trafalgar, ushered in a new battleship era, making everything else afloat obsolete. The advance in ship technology, however, was not accompanied by fresh and innovative thinking. (Royal Naval Museum)

self-confidence, the British accepted risks, made mistakes, and in almost all cases escaped punishment. The only admirals to be censured were those who passed up an opportunity to engage the enemy more closely. Brave men like Christopher Cradock, who went to his death well aware that he could not win, were following a false and dangerous distortion of the Nelson tradition, one that esteemed courage above intellect. Throughout the war the Navy was desperate to find something heroic to celebrate.

The public expected a second Trafalgar, entirely unaware of the very different situation pertaining in 1914. In Nelson's day the British had to pin the French fleets in harbour, to secure their ocean communications. In 1914 they had only to wait and watch, if the Germans wanted to go anywhere other than the Baltic, they would have to come right past the main British base at Scapa Flow. Nelson took risks and operated on the offensive because he commanded, the second or, in 1801, the third fleet. If he lost it would not be fatal. In 1914 –18 the defeat of the Grand Fleet would have been the end of the war for Britain, and her allies. Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, as Winston Churchill pointed out, was the one man who could have lost the war in an afternoon. Furthermore Jellicoe did not have a 'band of brothers' to work with, he had a collection of solid fellows who would do their duty, but lacked the wit and the confidence to function in the fast-moving and complex situations of modern war. Unlike Nelson they had gown up in a



HMS *Nelson* was the most powerful ship in the world when she was built, but the Nelson image had taken a severe dent at Jutland and would only be restored when threats such as the U-boats called for the familiar inventiveness and initiative. (Royal Naval Museum)

peace-time navy of neatness, drill and good order. Men past 40 found it was too late to be learning about war. Without experience to fall back on, they needed clear instructions, and solid routines.

Consequently at Jutland on 31 May 1916, Jellicoe hammered the High Seas Fleet, but rather than take risks late on a gloomy afternoon he preferred to complete the task the next morning. This was judicious, but it allowed the Germans to scuttle home. Jellicoe had missed his moment. His report reflected the profound gloom that this unsatisfactory result produced in the fleet. The Battlecruiser fleet under Admiral Beatty had been more aggressive, but Beatty lacked Jellicoe's calm professionalism. His reckless pursuit of battle cost two ships, and 2,000 sailors. After he took over the Grand Fleet Beatty relaxed the restrictive tactical systems imposed by Jellicoe, and curbed his own enthusiasm. While he proved an effective First Sea Lord in the 1920s, Beatty's failed attempt to be a 'Nelsonic' leader in wartime reflected a comprehensive misunderstanding of the man. Beatty looked the part, and took big decisions with confidence, but he lacked the reflective mind and professional dedication that informed Nelson's judgments.

The morning after Jutland the Kaiser had boasted 'The Magic of Trafalgar is broken!' He could not have been more wrong. His commander-in-chief Admiral Scheer, well aware of what had really happened, reported that the fleet must never again face the British. The only weapon left to the German Navy was the

U-boat, used in a manner that was both unprecedented and illegal. Among the heirs of Nelson were men with the education, technical knowledge and ability to defeat this novel menace. Old methods, like the escorted convoy, new weapons, sensors and platforms, depth charges, hydrophones and aircraft all played their part. So did sophisticated intelligence-gathering and processing of a type that Nelson would have recognized. Finally, the response was national, involving increased shipbuilding, shipping companies, insurance markets, inland transport and food rationing. The submarine attack on merchant shipping in the two World Wars would be the 20th century equivalent of the 1805 invasion threat, the greatest challenge to Britain's survival. It was defeated by a national effort, spearheaded by the Royal Navy. The Great War at sea was won by sound, reliable officers, men who would have found Earl St Vincent a suitable model. For more than four years they blockaded Germany, and Germany collapsed.

The lack of a great sea battle left many dissatisfied with the Navy's performance. There was little sacrifice to set against the massive cost of victory on land. This mood spilled over into the post-war analysis. Without a smashing battle victory, a second Trafalgar, the whole myth of Nelson and the Navy seemed to be diminished. Post-war the *Victory* was restored, while the new HMS *Nelson* was the most powerful ship in the world, but there were cracks in the Nelson façade. Were navies and heroes, battleships and history the best preparation for the future?

CHURCHILLIAN RHETORIC

The over-centralized, stiff tactical instructions the Royal Navy used during the First World War were neither in the tradition set by Nelson, nor particularly successful. Having learned this lesson in the hard school of battle, the officers who lead the Royal Navy in the Second World War were better prepared. They were also given far better doctrine. Officers were enjoined to seek close-range engagement, where the outcome would be decisive, at lower fighting ranges than rival fleets. The 1939 Fighting Instructions opened with a truly Nelsonic injunction:

> Captains, whenever they find themselves without specific directions during an action or are faced with unforeseen circumstances which render previous orders inapplicable, must act as their judgement dictates to further their Admiral's wishes. Care should be taken when framing instructions that these are not of too rigid a nature.[28]

With such a clear brief the Royal Navy recovered the initiative, élan and aggression that had made Nelson's fleets so effective. New leaders exploited these instructions to the full. Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham led the Mediterranean Fleet from 1940 to 1943 against seemingly insurmountable odds, his ceaseless determination to impose battle on a less willing Italian fleet gave the British a moral ascendancy that compensated for numerical inferiority. His

Admiral Cunningham's offensive spirit, particularly in the Mediterranean, was very much in the Nelson mould. Although many ships were sunk, he successfully upheld a centuries-old tradition. (Royal Naval Museum)

ultimate trial came off Crete in 1941, where the Navy had to evacuate a defeated British army under incessant attack by highly proficient Luftwaffe bombers. The fleet was decimated. Even the Army chiefs told Cunningham that he had done enough, and must not risk any more ships. Cunningham disagreed; 'It takes three years to build a ship', he observed, 'but it takes three hundred years to build a tradition.' Like Nelson he rose to every challenge, including those that lay outside his professional experience. Cunningham ended the war as First Sea Lord, and like Nelson, became a Viscount. His bust rightly stands on the north wall of Trafalgar Square, alongside Jellicoe and Beatty. Nor was he alone; like Nelson he was supported by outstanding officers in all ranks, Captain, later Admiral Sir Phillip Vian was one such. He began the war commanding a destroyer flotilla, progressed to escorting Malta convoys, commanded British naval forces at the D-Day landings, and ended the war in command of the British Pacific Fleet's Aircraft carrier Task Force. His tactical genius was only equalled by his willingness to act on his own initiative. Cunningham's finest moment came when, having sent Vian to escort a vital Malta convoy, he left him to control a major battle, in which his force was heavily outnumbered. He knew that the man on the spot was best placed to make decisions, and that Vian had earned his trust. A lesser man would have interfered.

At the outbreak of the Second World War the Navy found itself once more under the political direction of Winston Churchill. This time it would be his finest qualities that were most in evidence. In the darkest period of the war, from the fall of France in May 1940 to the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 Churchill's belief in ultimate victory, his confidence in the Navy, and his constant references to Nelson imbued his leadership and his speeches with a conviction that no one else in British public life could match. His radio broadcasts exploited the new medium to perfection, using well known phrases and historical examples to reinforce his argument. He called Nelson to aid the war effort with far more skill than had been the case a generation earlier. It was perhaps fortunate that his *The History of the English Speaking Peoples* had reached Trafalgar in early September 1939,[29] leaving the subject fresh in his mind. The connection was reinforced when he spent a day on board the Home Fleet flagship, HMS *Nelson*. By February 1940 he was ready to speak:

> The warrior heroes of the past may look down, as Nelson's monument looks down upon us now, without any feeling that the island race has lost its daring or that the examples which they set in bygone centuries have faded as the generations have succeeded to one another.

On becoming Prime Minister Churchill faced the gravest crisis since 1805, France was about to surrender, Italy had joined the war and Japan was increasingly hostile. By any rational calculation Britain could not survive. But Churchill, adopting a Nelson motto, went for 'the boldest measures'. His first decision was to take, sink, burn or otherwise destroy as much of the powerful French fleet as the Navy could reach. At Mers el Kebir the British opened fire on ships that had, but scant days before, been serving at their side. The French fleet was crippled, more than 1,500 men died and the event left a bitter legacy. But it also impressed upon Hitler, Stalin and Roosevelt the conviction that Britain would not surrender, and thereby changed the history of world. With no hope of a compromise peace, Hitler was forced to show his hand, and while the Luftwaffe held its own over southern Britain, Germany had nothing to counter the Royal Navy. As in 1805, any attempt to cross the Channel would have ended in disaster. While invasion threatened, Nelson was never far from Churchill's thoughts. He used Nelson's line about the want of frigates as the basis for his plea to Roosevelt to supply old destroyers, and told the Houses of Commons that the government was acting on good precepts in attacking enemy invasion harbours. 'As in Nelson's day, the maxim holds, 'our First line of Defence is the enemy's ports.' He compared the crisis to 'when Nelson stood between us and Napoleon's Grand Army at Boulogne.'[30]

Nelson's front line service in this war ended with the German invasion of the

Winston Churchill made full use of Nelson and Trafalgar imagery in conjuring up a spirit of resistance in the dark days of the Second World War. (BBC Photo Library)

Soviet Union. In the darkest hour, when the nation needed more than facts, Churchill employed the ultimate expression of British resistance to continental threat, the magic of Nelson and Trafalgar. In the process he created his own legend. He also helped Alexander Korda script his film *Lady Hamilton*. Laurence Olivier gave Nelson a pronunciation quite unlike his thin nasal Norfolk drawl, but his Nelson stood for Britain, the Britain of the Blitz, defying the tyrant. Like the original, he had a dry humor, but unlike the hero of 1805 he was fashionably understated and reserved, his upper lip inappropriately stiff. [31] Churchill never tired of hearing Olivier deliver the portentous line: 'You can't make peace with dictators'. This was not surprising, he had written it! The film was shown many times at Chequers, to the consternation of his staff, who found the experience a trifle wearing. He would then dictate suitably Nelsonian missives to unfortunate senior officers, for whom 'No Captain can do very wrong... .' may not have been the most welcome advice.[32]

Throughout the war, Trafalgar Square was used as a national point of reference, filled with images and artefacts for Warship Week, and events for the other services. Then it became the focal point for suitably enthusiastic celebrations of peace, civilians mixing with servicemen and women from many nations. Victory in Europe and Victory over Japan Day passed off under the empty gaze of a silent statue, the man it recalled passing out of the national consciousness as the country turned from war to peace, from danger to opportunity. New heroes were required: the old ones were no longer relevant.

POST-IMPERIAL MALAISE

Post-war the glory faded, the threat passed, replaced by new menaces in the shape of the hydrogen bomb. What use was Nelson now? The last ship to bear the greatest name in naval history, HMS *Nelson*, a mighty battleship with a proud war record, was used to test bombs before being scrapped. She was replaced by an accommodation block at Portsmouth. No other navy in the world would waste such a potent talisman of glory, success and power on something so banal. Fortunately there is a nuclear powered submarine bearing the name HMS *Trafalgar.* Attitudes to Nelson still mirrored the national mood, and the national need. As the empire passed, and the historians of decline argued that it was all over for Britain, Nelson was tarnished with the sins of his age, and the fatal curse of a celebrity personal life. He could be set aside, reduced to a cartoon caricature, more famous for loving Lady Hamilton than winning battles.

INTO THE MODERN AGE

Then it all turned around. In 1982, with the Royal Navy on the verge of politically disastrous cuts, the Argentine junta invaded the Falkland Islands. The Navy was saved, and the values of the greatest naval hero of them all came to fore – decisive leadership, commitment and professionalism. Since then the revival of the nation, the navy and the hero of Trafalgar has gone apace. The Royal Navy enshrined what Nelson meant in their doctrine in 1996, and has kept those ideas refreshed in the years that followed. It is a mark of the confidence of the modern service that it is ready to assume the mantle of genius, rather than relying on simplistic formulae.

Nelson's standing as the greatest British warrior hero is unquestioned, his name, image and memorials are central to the British identity. Even in times of profound peace he remains one of the best known names from the British past For the rest of the world he is equally iconic, and irresistible. When other navies choose their own ultimate hero he becomes their Nelson, as if his name had

HMS *Sheffield*. In the face of cuts, real and threatened, by its own Government, the Royal Navy succeeded in deploying thousands of miles away from home for a hazardous invasion of the Falkland Islands. In doing so, it amply justified its existence. (Royal Naval Museum)

become the noun for naval genius. All those navies with a soul would send a ship to join the bicentenary fleet review at Spithead, when all would recall the triumph and tragedy of Trafalgar. Two hundred years later, Nelson and Trafalgar remain a matchless combination of talismanic names, the ultimate achievement of war at sea.

ENDNOTES

Introduction

1 The first five wars were: The Nine Years' War, 1689–97; The War of the Spanish Succession, 1702–12; The War of 1739–48; The Seven Years' War, 1756–63; the War for America, 1778–83.

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22 Burrows, *French Exile Journalism,* pp. 121–27.

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Chapter 4

1 My previous work which was dedicated to Latouche-Tréville, the only French admiral who held Nelson in check, prepared me for this task. The absence of recent French works, and above all the useful contacts I was able to make with British and Spanish historians, strengthened my resolve.

2 Minister for the Navy in 1800 and 1801, then inspector of the Channel fleet.

3 They also had a reserve of 40 vessels in British ports which could be armed quickly and which would serve to replace units lost in battle.

4 Commander of the rear guard and kept out of the combat by Nelson, Villeneuve did not attempt to come to the aid of the remainder of the French squadron.

5 At Trafalgar, the largest vessel present was the *Santísima Trinidad* (61.3m long), but certain French triple-deck ships, absent from the battle, measured 63.6m. The French 80 cannon vessels, such as the *Bucentaure* (59.3m), were clearly longer than the *Victory* (56.7m).

6 The French pound is heavier than the English pound.

7 The garrisons correspond to Royal Marine contingents aboard British ships.

8 The British call this 'The Battle of the Glorious First of June'.

9 This fierce hatred, which bordered on the irrational, had something disturbing about it. It contrasted sharply with the attitudes of the other admirals, Nelson's contemporaries, who respected their adversaries and could maintain friendly relations with them once a conflict was over. This was the case with Keith, Elphinstone, Duckworth and Latouche-Tréville.

10 This was the case, notably, for William Stanhope Lovell, midshipman on board the *Neptune*.

11 I have shown that Robert Guillemard, the sergeant on board the *Redoutable* purported to have killed Nelson from the top of the mizzenmast, was a fictional character invented by the author of his supposed memoirs.

12 The famous painting by Benjamin West entitled *The Immortality of Nelson*, which is kept in the National Maritime Museum, represents a real ascension of the hero.

Chapter 5

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2 NMM, SIG/A/1, and NM/104.

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10 *Barrington*, op. cit., I, pp. 259–60.

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